

Ark Volume 04

Act 1 : The Giran's Institute of Magic

BOOM, FLAAASH!

A ray of light struck the magic tower. Sparks came off the equipment attached to the transmitter as light particles gathered. The light particles that moved along the complicated tangle of glass tubes soon transformed into the shape of a person atop a magic circle.

It was a normal-looking youth, which was actually rare in the virtual reality game where 90% of players changed their appearances. He really couldn't be called handsome, and there was a surprising grain of truth in calling him ugly; this incomparably vague character's name was Ark.

"Pant, pant, arrived at last... bleh, BLEECH!"

Ark retched with a green face.

"I thought I was gonna go mad. I've never even been carsick, this is really..."

From Jackson to Giran, letter movement only took 3 minutes. That was the time it took for cup noodles to become done at the perfect state for eating. But that mere 3 minutes dealt Ark mental damage that he didn't want to experience a second time. Still, it was quite fresh and fun at first. When he turned into particles of light, it felt just like he was leaving his body. The sense of weightlessly becoming one with the air! Since he was cutting through the sky in such a state, it was like he had become wind. Everyone has probably imagined it once; becoming a wisp of wind and speeding over mountains, valleys, and plains. That imagination had become reality.

"Woaaaaah, this is awesome!"

That sense of liberation! That freedom!

A cheer burst out of him as he looked at the scenery that was speeding past. But it didn't even take 10 seconds for his cheer to turn into a scream.

The sudden jumps, dives, and turns that unfurled!

Would riding a rollercoaster without the seat belt feel like this? No, it felt like being in a cocktail cup being swished around by a bartender. He jolted from side to side, and the sky and ground flipped countless times...

It still seemed like the floor was shaking underneath him, so he couldn't even stand up straight.

'Dammit, what the hell is this frickin' over the top reality!'

"Are you Ark?"

He heard a rough voice from behind him. Turning around with sunken eyes, he saw an old Magician with a beard that fell to his chest approaching him.

"Do you know me?"

"I just received word from the Jackson Magic Institute. But I knew of your name before that, from the crewmen of the Silver Arrow who arrived a few days ahead of you."

"Ah, did they arrive well?"

"Of course. They couldn't come meet you because they're out on other business, but they told me to send you their greetings." The old Magician laughed awkwardly as he shrugged his shoulders. "But it looks like you're not in any shape to ask after *their* health. Are you okay?"

"Honestly, I can't really say that I'm alright."

"Well, letter movement is still in the testing stage, so it couldn't have been a comfortable journey."

"It's not just at the level of not being comfortable though?"

"Apparently the weather was particularly bad today so letter movement was also several times more unstable than normal. Even if we are the Magic Institute, we can't do anything about the weather. So to speak, you had bad luck."

"Ah, is that so? Thanks so much for your kind explanation. Why didn't you tell me that a few days earlier?"

Ark glared at the old Magician who was smiling as he explained. But even if his insides were heaving, Ark wasn't one to talk carelessly to a NPC.

The Magic Institute reward that he'd been waiting and waiting for was right in front of him. There was no reason to complain and lower the Magic Institute NPC's mood.

"But ah, the promised..."

Just when Ark was about to gingerly bring up the topic at hand, the old magician slapped his knee as if he had just remembered.

“Ah, just look at my state of mind. Introductions are late. My name is Bargenhardt Shannen. I’m the president of the Giran Magic Institute.”

‘The Giran Magic Institute president?’

Ark swallowed what he was about to say and stared in surprise at the old magician, Shannen.

There were about 20 Magic Institute branches set up throughout the large cities of Schudenberg Kingdom. The Giran Magic Institute was the place that centralized all those branches. Therefore, it meant the Giran Magic Institute president was the NPC who had the highest status amongst the Magicians of Schudenberg Kingdom. You’d have to be a guild master affiliated with the Magic Institute to meet this top NPC.

“If it’s fine with you, can you spare some time to drink a cup of tea?”

“Of course.”

Ark hastily drew out his business smile as he nodded.

Truth be told, he wasn’t in the mood to leisurely share idle prattle. Leaving the nausea from the aftereffects of the letter movement aside, Ark was only interested in the Magic Institute’s reward right now. But in both reality and the game, personal connections were the most important aspect. What’s more, it was hard for a normal player to even glimpse this high ranking NPC’s face, and he had amiably approached Ark first. There was no reason to refuse.

You had to make an impression on people in lofty positions first. Also, in light of his experience so far, there was a 90% chance that a situation like this was connected to a quest.

“I was just wanting a steamy cup of tea because my stomach isn’t feeling so well.”

“That’s a relief.”

Shannen pointed to one side and a door on the opposite side automatically opened. A table with refreshments was prepared in an tidy room that emitted the atmosphere of a study.

“The heroism I heard of from the former bosun of the Silver Arrow, Jabel, made a very deep impression.” said Shannen slowly as he raised his teacup. “Not only did

you remember in such a crazy situation and rescue the crewmen, but you also nursed the refugees out of your own accord even though no one forced you to, yes? Everyone knows that they were the right things to do and that they should do them, but it's not easy to actually take action. I was truly touched."

"I'm flattered."

"No, no. That was something anyone would praise. Is that all? The ingeniousness and boldness you displayed when succeeding an impossible operation by using the Spear of Thor was incredible enough to make me immodestly burst into a cheer. Well, though the Spear of Thor which cost thousands of Gold to make was broken beyond repair thanks to that."

"That... I'm sorry."

Ark watched Shannen with a guilty expression. 'Surely he's not asking me to pay for it?'

Thankfully Shannen wasn't thinking about it so seriously and burst into jolly laughter. "Hahaha, I didn't bring it up to blame you. An item has to be used where it's needed to get your money's worth. There's no point if you spend ten thousand Gold to make it but you don't spend it where necessary. In any case, your deeds were great enough that it's not out of place to call you a hero. However, that is not the reason I took an interest in you. It was actually what you did after that."

"Huh? After that?"

"You took 1st place in contribution in this operation, right?"

"How did you know that?" Ark asked back in a slightly surprised voice.

Since he had the Magic Institute's Badge on him, of course the Magic Institute would be able to check how much contribution he had accumulated. Only then would they be able to prepare a reward suitable for the contribution points. But Ark hadn't fathomed that Shannen would be aware of the ranking when even the Lord of Jackson hadn't known.

With a faint smile, Shannen lowered his voice. "The 3 Great Guilds are a larger and more massive organization than you know. You might have thought you didn't reveal yourself, but the Magic Institute, the Warrior Guild, and the Merchant Guild have memorized the name of Ark. Although, I can't say if that is a good or bad thing for you."

The NPCs of New World were really not to be underestimated.

Ark hadn't registered his contribution ranking in the Hall of Fame. Of course, he had been certain that the only ones who knew that would be himself and Global Exos. However, it seemed that it wasn't such a simple issue.

Besides the historical background, New World was no different from reality. Unlike existing games, the NPCs here didn't just move and think based on the information they were given. Like people in reality, they were existences with perfect AIs that thought and gathered necessary information on their own initiative. Like players, the experiences and thoughts of these NPCs produced variables separate from the system.

'To think such a thing would be possible...'

Actually, Ha Myung-woo had already explained something like this in the reception room before. But hearing the explanation and experiencing it yourself was a completely different feeling.

'Well, I didn't register in the Hall of Fame because I didn't want to attract the attention of the players...'

It wasn't much of a problem if an NPC knew. No, this could be a good thing, since there would be more NPCs like Shannen who approached him while praising Ark's contribution.

"That's why I definitely wanted to meet you. Just why did you hide the fact that you took 1st place? And why did you suddenly hide yourself, not even showing up while the foreigners who rose to the top 10, including Sir Alan, were all being praised? Can you tell me why?"

"There wasn't a great reason for it. There wasn't really a reason to hide, but I didn't want to put myself out there and show off. Shall I say that I didn't have the confidence to deal with the attention I would receive from it? I just did my best with what I was given, and I was more than satisfied enough with the fact that I helped."

"It's just as I imagined. Admirable! I don't know about others, but I rate that attitude highly. It is never easy for a hot-blooded young man to control his ambition." Shannen nodded with a satisfied expression. Then he continued in a low voice, "In fact, I've been waiting for a person like you."

"What?"

"A warrior with the strength and courage to win in any situation, no matter how difficult, and also has the prudence to keep a secret. I thought that such a person would be able to listen to my concern. How about it? Are you such a person?"

‘As expected!’

Ark’s eyes glittered. He was right on the mark with his guess that this might be linked to a quest. Without delay, Ark gave the answer Shannen wanted to hear.

“Of course. I am always prepared to hear the concern of another person. In addition, I don’t like speaking out in front of others, so no one will know my requester’s trouble.”

A request is always welcome! A thorough guarantee to safeguard the customer’s information!

Ark presented words that were like the advertisement phrases of a moneylender.

It seemed like he scratched the itch properly. Shannen nodded in satisfaction. “Good, you’re very much to my liking. Then let’s get right to the point. I’ll tell you this in advance, but this is a very delicate problem. It could easily deal a fatal blow to the Magic Institute’s status if it were to get out. However, I’ll believe in the actions you showed in Jackson and tell you.”

‘Ah, how long is he intending to go around and around dodging the point?’

Around the point when his annoyance was slowly boiling up, Shannen finally brought up the main subject. “The issue I want to discuss with you is about a stolen artifact.”

“An artifact?”

“It’s called the Heartsoul Bead. As one of the ancient relics, it is a dangerous item imbued with powerful and ominous magic. If this artifact were to fall into the hands of evil, there is no knowing what kind of horrible calamity it will bring about. That’s why it is something that the Magic Institute has been sealing away since long ago... one year ago, it vanished completely.”

Listening to the explanation, Ark tilted his head. “The Magic Institute is an extremely large organization, right?”

“Of course. It is a guild with 70 branches all over the continent. If you add in the sub-guilds founded by foreigners, then there’s too many to count.”

“Then are you saying that the Magic Institute wasn’t able to find it for a year even with such power?”

"That's..." Shannen shook his head, looking troubled. "I understand your question. However, the Magic Institute is in a position where we cannot openly look for the Heartsoul Bead."

"What do you mean?"

"The Heartsoul Bead was being guarded by the Magic Institute, but strictly speaking, it doesn't belong to the Magic Institute. A long time ago, the Schudenberg Royal Family requested that the Magic Institute safeguard it. If it gets known that the Heartsoul Bead was stolen, the Magic Institute will have to take responsibility and will be put into a very difficult situation. That is why we couldn't openly seek the location of the artifact."

"So in the end, you mean that maintaining the secret you entrusted to me and being careful is so that the Royal Family doesn't find out."

"It's not just the Royal Family."

"Huh?"

"We have to be more careful of the Warrior Guild and the Merchant Guild than the Royal Family."

Shannen went on to explain that even if the Schudenberg Royal Family were to find out, they could use political force to soothe them to a certain degree. The Magic Institute had that much influence. But those methods wouldn't work on the Warrior Guild and the Merchant Guild, who wielded influence rivaling the Magic Institute. On the surface, the 3 Great Guilds solved the continent's problems while holding hands, but they were actually rivals waging a cutthroat power struggle. If they were to find out about the artifact robbery, there was no knowing what kind of ridiculous demand either guild might impose using the incident as an excuse.

'Hmm, I'm roughly starting to understand the power structure of New World.'

The relationship between the Schudenberg Kingdom and the 3 Great Guilds... the worldview of the New World that surrounded Ark was slowly becoming more complicated. It wasn't just New World, but most online games had a unique worldview. There were power relations between the various organizations and countries that existed within the game.

Of course, there was no need for you to give yourself headaches thinking about it in your beginner days. In addition, the power relations didn't often affect the players. But the situation would change as your level grew higher and you did harder quests. Depending on how the worldview was set up, situations would branch into

countless choices, and the player's experience would be affected based on their choice. For example, doing a quest for Party A could make you the enemy of Party B.

However, Ark didn't think about it too seriously. 'I can't be afraid to build a house for fear of splinters.'

There was still more he didn't know about New World than what he did know. With the little knowledge he had, he was in no position to shirk this and that. No matter how realistic it was, New World was an online game; what the player Ark had to do and what he was interested in wouldn't change.

He would solve the quest given to him and receive a reward!

There was a need to know the NPC's inside story in order to solve a quest, but there was no reason for it to get more serious than that. Though of course, he needed to make a serious expression in front of the NPC...

"It seems like you have many concerns."

"Indeed, it has been a year since the Heartsoul Bead was stolen; it seems that the Warrior Guild and the Merchant Guild have gotten wind of it. They haven't been frankly expressing their suspicion yet, but if they've caught on, then the secret won't be kept for much longer. More so if we flounder to openly look for the artifact, of course."

"So that's why you're asking me, someone who has no direct relationship with the Magic Institute."

"That's exactly right. You proved that you aren't one to betray someone's trust because of greed with the Jackson incident. I can believe you and entrust it to you. How about it? Do you think you can help?"

"I have never turned away from a person seeking help"

"Are you saying you'll accept?"

"Of course. If it is an item that could bring about disaster to the world, we have to recover it no matter what. However, I don't know where to start since there aren't any clues."

"I wouldn't have even brought it up to you if we didn't have a clue."

"Is there something?"

"It's something that happened a while back. The Guards took care of one of the thieves that had infiltrated Giran, but something like this came from him. The Guards felt magic power from it, so they asked the Magic Institute to examine it."

Shannen showed him a small shard of iron that glittered with silver luster.

"This is...?"

"It's a shard that fell off the Ward that was sealing the Heartsoul Bead."

"So that means someone among the thieves around Giran stole the Heartsoul Bead."

"Indeed."

"Are there any other clues?"

"Unfortunately, that's all we currently know."

Ark sighed at Shannen's answer. One of the thief gangs around the extensive Giran had the artifact. Wasn't that information as vague as telling him to find a grain of sand in a desert?

'Well, whatever. There must be some way to solve it since I received the quest.'

Ark had intended to immerse himself in hunting around Giran for a while anyways. Rather than thoughtlessly hunting, he would be more motivated if there was some kind of objective. Moreover, the quest was about something very serious. Since it was such an important matter, that meant he could expect a considerable reward if he solved it. There was no reason to refuse.

"I'll do my best."

As Ark nodded, the quest information window popped up.

Find the Heartsoul Bead!
The president of the Giran Magic Institute has offered you a secret task. One year ago, the Heartsoul Bead, which was under the protection of the Magic Institute, was stolen. Shannen suspects that one of the thief gangs active near Giran is the culprit. You must gather more information from the thieves and find the Heartsoul Bead.
However, you must maintain completely secrecy for this task. If the task is exposed to an NPC within the Royal Family, Merchant Guild, or Warrior Guild, then the situation will worsen. Should that happen, Shannen will cancel the task and harbor

animosity towards you, who was unable to keep the secret.

Should you cancel the quest or fail, Friendship with the Magic Institute will become 0. In addition, if the secret is exposed, the Merchant Guild and Warrior Guild will become hostile towards you even if you succeed the quest.

Difficulty: ??

Quest Restriction: Within the top 50 for contribution in the Hero Assembly quest. At least 50 Friendship with the Magic Institute.

‘Eh? What is this?’

After actually checking the quest description, the conditions were more particular than he thought. Ark had planned on gleaning information from the Guards that had executed the thief or from a mercenary NPC first. It would have also been good to ask a merchant NPC, who had to keep tabs on thief information at all times. But if there was a condition that he couldn’t be found out by the Merchant Guild and Warrior Guild, then it would be tough to interact with them.

‘I have to find a single bead in the vicinity of this huge Giran in a situation where I can’t even ask NPCs for information... dammit, I’m starting to think I made a mistake.’

However, he had already accepted the quest. His Friendship with one of the 3 Great Guilds, the Magic Institute, would be reduced to 0 if he abandons the quest, so he had no choice but to try whether he felt he would live or die.

‘It’s uncomfortable on many fronts, but it can’t be helped. I’ve accepted the quest, so I’ve got no choice but to look for a way somehow.’

Ark set aside his worries about the quest for now. That was because the reward for the quest he had already solved was more pressing than worries about a new quest. Also, Ark’s second objective, obtaining information about Snake’s metamorphosis, was an urgent matter. Since it was something that had happened because of a magic ingredient, getting info from a Magician would be faster.

But Shannen just tilted his head. “I do know about the Fruit of Basium. It *is* used as a magic ingredient for various things, but the fruit itself has a fatal poison. If a Human, of course, or any monster were to eat the Fruit of Basium, they would perish. But to think that there is a creature that survived even after eating it... I don’t know how that came to be. And I know nothing about the Alamone Larvae. I’d have to look for materials on it, but I can’t be sure since it is a race that went extinct long ago, even in the Netherworld.”

"I see..." A quiet sigh flowed out of him on its own.

Snake only had 6 days left now. To be honest, he had half given up on successfully ending the metamorphosis. But there was no guarantee that another opportunity like this wouldn't come again. If at least for that time, he needed to figure out the secret to Snake's growth beforehand. But if even the Magic Institute's president didn't know, then just where in the world was he supposed to find the information?

"I'm sorry about that."

"No, it can't be helped."

"Then there's just one thing left to do. I should give you the promised reward," Shannen said, as if to excite the mood.

Needless to say, Ark's depressed eyes became luminous as a result.

Shannen grinned as he nodded. "Actually, after receiving the report on the results, I had quite an enjoyable worry to consider until now. I didn't know that there would be someone among the Magic Institute's volunteer troops who would accumulate more than 50 thousand contribution. You can be proud of yourself, since it means you contributed that marvelously. So you know, how about you choose the reward yourself?"

"Are you saying I can choose it myself?"

As Ark tilted his head, Shannen lightly clapped his hands. A door opened on one side as a young Magician walked out.

"Did you call, President?"

"Guide this friend to the repository on the 10th floor."

"To the repository on the 10th floor?" The young Magician asked back with a surprised expression.

"Yes, this young man is that qualified. Allow him to take one item of his choice, no matter what it is. He has already received permission from the upper echelons."

"I understand."

"Ark, I'll rise first."

At the end of those words, Shannen left the room.

The young Magician approached and politely bowed. "Please follow me."

Ark followed the young Magician to the 10th floor. Once he got out of the elevator that moved via magic power, he was blocked by a stone gate engraved with a complicated pattern. As if it had several layers of Protect on it, the stone gate crawled upwards with a heavy groan only after the young Magician worked on it for a while.

'Damn, these, these are all items?'

At the sight that was gradually being revealed with a radiant light, Ark's eyes became as wide as saucers. All kinds of items were on display, packed closely and in abundance within the large stone chamber. Each and every one of them were shining brilliantly; he could tell they were Rare items in one glance. So to speak, they were lumps of money!

It was a spectacle that would set any gamer drooling.

"This is the repository where the Magic Institute's most precious treasures are gathered," said the young Magician with a proud expression. "Even the cheapest one here would likely be well worth 100 Gold. Also, you are the first stranger to enter this place. Since you have Master Shannen's permission, please select one of the items here. We will give that to you as a reward."

"One... you say?"

"Yes, one. I'm saying this by way of caution, but you will only have one chance. Please choose carefully."

The young Magician replied firmly as he operated a device. Then there was a sound of machinery as the display case protecting the items was pushed up. As a result, the brilliance shining from the items became a level stronger, making his eyes hurt.

'Be careful or whatever, you say...'

Ark gulped down his saliva as he went around the room.

As the young Magician had said, any one of them would reap 100 Gold. No, they were Rare items well worth hundreds of Gold. Since he was surrounded in such items, it felt like he couldn't breathe.

'Gulp, are you telling me to choose *one* from all of these?'

The young Magician had spoken as if to do him a kindness, but to Ark, there was no greater torture than this. He had to pick just one item in a room filled with Rare items that were so close he could touch them if he reached out his hand? Rather than hearing that he'd be given one, he heard it as taking away all the rest.

But Ark steeled himself with all his effort. 'Be, be cool, Ark. This is really a chance that doesn't come twice. One choice can bring in several tens of Won, no, several hundreds of Won. If I get excited and choose foolishly, I might regret it for the rest of my life!'

There was a trap to the Magic Institute's reward. If he put his hand on an item and checked its info, that would be the end of it. In other words, it was the same system as the blind auction.

Thankfully, Ark had a perceptiveness that had been polished and refined in the blind auction house. But that ability actually became a hindrance here. It would be easy if the good and bad were cleanly divided instead. However, this place was literally a treasure storage. The goods inside the room all looked incredibly awesome. No, all of them were good. Since he had to choose the one that was the best out of them all, it was hard for him to appraise them properly because his greed kept flaring out.

'Gasp, this sword... it looks good! Just what stats does it have?'

Ark was stretching out his hand as if drawn like a magnet before he shook his head, startled.

'No, no. Get ahold of yourself, Ark. There's no time limit, so there's no need to rush. Look at them all and choose the one that looks the best out of them!'

Ark composed his breathing, which had become rough. Then he began to carefully check out the items as he went around the repository. Cold sweat trickled down his forehead, as if he had just gone through a battle. Then, when he had gone through around half of the items—

Hiss hiss!

He felt his waist being constricted as Snake squirmed. Having as much interest in items as Ark, it seemed that Snake was also overexcited. But Ark had no time to pay attention to Snake's reaction.

"Don't distract me, Snake."

As Ark glared brusquely at it, Snake lowered its head with a sullen face. Snake pestered him a few times after that as well, but Ark had no leisure to pay attention to such a reaction.

Stats varied wildly between items, even if they were all Rare. It was common sense that an item with a high level restriction generally had higher stats; even if it was a Rare item, he wouldn't be able to expect much money or performance from a level 10. On the other hand, if it was level 100, then he would be able to get an enormous price for even a simple Magic item.

Therefore, Ark's choice centered around the item with the highest level restriction. And after roughly 30 minutes had passed, he was finally able to narrow it down to three items.

A longsword that emitted a frosty blue luster.

White plate armor engraved in a golden design.

A leather helmet decorated with jewels of five colors.

As befitting of items he had picked and found, the energy they exuded was unusual. Having picked three items for the time being, Ark agonized for a long time.

'I'm gonna go crazy. I'm certain these three are items at the highest level here...'

In the end, Ark started ruling them out one by one through the process of elimination. 'There's no merit to getting an item and just selling it. It's best to use it for as long as its worthwhile before selling it. For that purpose, it'll be better to give up on the item with a high chance of being for Warriors only.'

Accordingly, the plate armor was out.

'The rest are the sword and helmet... Dammit, this is as hard as choosing between black bean noodles and spicy seafood ramen. But even if they both have magic effects on them, it's way harder and more expensive to acquire a weapon than armor. My ultimate objective is to sell it in the auction anyways, so if I had to choose between the two, it'd have to be the sword. Alright, I've decided. Huhuhu, now, how awesome an item will it be...'

[T/N: Black bean noodles and spicy seafood ramen are very common Chinese-style foods in Korea.]

Having made up his mind, Ark stretched his hand towards the sword.

At that moment, something he'd never even imagined happened.

Hiss hiss, HISSSSS!

Restless ever since Ark narrowed it down to three and started agonizing, Snake suddenly yanked on his waist. Having been concentrating on the item alone, Ark was dragged over with nary a chance to resist. Then, in the moment when he was about to catch his balance with a shocked face—!

Wasn't Snake desperately extending its neck and stretching out its tongue? And then, in the space of a cry, Snake gulped down a frayed book that was lying on the side.

It was after that the display case closed with the sound of machinery.

"EHH? W-WHAT?!"

A message window suddenly popped up before his eyes.

Deadly Poison Preparation Tome (Rare)
Usage Restriction: Thief-related profession at level 50 or higher.

"A tome? A TOME, YOU SAY?"

Ark's face went green. Just what kind of unexpected bombshell was this?! Out of all the items that he could get hundreds of Gold for, a fucking *tome*?

Granted, a Rare tome was also a considerably valuable item. But no matter how precious it was, it couldn't compare to a Rare weapon. Even worse, Deadly Poison wasn't even a tome for all professions. Since it had a profession restriction, he couldn't expect a very good price for it.

"W-what the hell is this, Snake!"

As Ark screamed, Snake shrank away, startled. Ark ground his teeth before hurriedly staring at the young Magician.

"You saw, right Th-this is a mistake. I wasn't the one who chose, so please let me choose again."

But the young Magician replied with a smooth smile. "Of course, you cannot."

Th-th-thump, a quest window came up.

The quest 'Magic Institute's Reward' has been completed.
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You, who contributed greatly to protecting Jackson Castle, received a reward worthy of your effort from the Magic Institute. Even with many treasures left in front of you, you have decided to be satisfied with a small reward. The young Magician will report your humility, and Shannen will be deeply impressed once again.

With this, your contract with the Magic Institute has ended.

+50 Friendship with the Magic Institute.

“ARRGHH!”

Ark’s scream rang within the repository.

* * *

“...This is a disappointment. Snake!”

Having been rolling around on the ground tearing out his hair for a while, those were the first words Ark spat out.

With a very downcast face, Snake was on the verge of tears. It was a very pitiable sight, but there was not a whit of sympathy in Ark’s eyes.

The glamorous longsword that had emanated a blue chill was still shimmering in front of his eyes. There were many weapons with magic effects, but swords that showed such obvious magic effects were certainly few and far in between.

Just how much damage would it have had? What kind of options did it have?

Having been unable to acquire it, he came to think of the sword as an even greater item. In addition, a weapon with a frost-related magic effect was something that all players would drool over. Unlike other magic effects that ended with just dealing additional damage, frost-related ones activated the Slow hex at high rates. Thanks to that, there were cases where such items were sold with a premium of an additional several thousand Won, even if they were at the same grade of rarity. That had been replaced with an old tome right before his eyes.

Wasn’t this like going into a buffet that cost a thousand dollars and coming out after eating just green beans?

It was to the point where it would actually be more strange if he didn’t go mad.

“Just why the hell did you do such a thing!”

Hiss hiss, hissss!

Snake put a lot of effort into justifying itself, flickering its tongue. But there was no way Ark could understand Snake's words, so he could only see it as Snake teasing him. Since the opposite party wasn't even Dedric, but the Snake he had trusted, the feeling of betrayal was even greater.

"Put away your tongue! Shut up! Dammit, do you know what the hell you did? It was a chance for me to choose any item worth hundreds of thousands of Won, an item that could buy several thousand rolls of kimbap!"

Ahh, what poor imagination, to use just kimbap as a metaphor for the value of hundreds of thousands of Won; but Ark's staple was the cheap and simple kimbap, so there was no helping it.

"You ate a thousand rolls of kimbap just now! Do you even know?"

At last, tears began to drip from Snake's eyes.

Dedric grinned as he added oil to the fire. "Kekeke, just look at you. And you're the one that always gets loved by Master! I knew a day like this would come some day! Master, you can't let it go. You have to use this chance to clearly teach Snake its place! Snake's place!"

"Shut up!"

"Che, why're you getting mad at me? I'm the one you always kill."

"You, really—!"

"Alright, I get it. I'll be quiet."

Ark pierced Dedric with a menacing look before abruptly tearing at his hair.

He knew. It was already spilled milk. No matter how much he raged and struggled, the quest was already finished; no matter what he did, there was no way to turn back what was done.

In a case like this, the usual Ark would quickly let it go. Ark was the type to carry out something to the end with all his power once he made up his mind, but he was also quick to give up on things that couldn't be done even if he tried. But this time, it wasn't easy to give up on it. A person who thought they had won the lottery, but found out the date was wrong would feel like this.

"Dammit, I don't need a Familiar that acts as it pleases, scram!"

For some time, Ark clutched his head, and Snake cried.

Once his agitation calmed down a little, he realized something strange.

‘Huh? Wait, how did Snake swallow an item?’

Ark finally realized that there was a contradiction to Snake’s actions. Snake had gone into metamorphosis through the Fruit of Basium. And during metamorphosis, it couldn’t swallow or even spit out items. Hadn’t it tried several times to eat items, but immediately spat them out? But Snake hadn’t expelled the tome yet. Metamorphosis lasted 20 days. He had spent about 13 days in Jackson, so there were still 7 days left.

Just then, Skull, who had determined the atmosphere early on and had been laying low, suddenly leapt up as it forcefully clacked its teeth.

Clack, cla-cla-clack! Cla-clack!

“What, even you... eh? Snake!” Raising his head, Ark burst out in shock.

Snake was lying limp next to Skull. Startled, he urgently lifted Snake and felt it was as cold as ice. Then the scales lost their elasticity as Snake had gone into metamorphosis began to peel and fall away.

“What? What’s wrong? What’s happening? Snake!”

“Ehh? Why is this fella suddenly like this? Su-surely not *obliteration*?”

“Obliteration? *Obliteration*?”

“Dammit, this is because of you, Master! All because you said you didn’t need him! We’re Familiars. If our Master casts us away, we can’t live on! How could you obliterate Snake because of a mere item!”

Dedric seized Ark’s hair and shook it around. His relationship with Snake wasn’t good, but it was still a teammate that had been with Dedric so far. He had teased Snake accusingly, but it seemed he didn’t actually feel that way. Not knowing what to do, Skull was also trembling. At the reaction of the Familiars, Ark’s heart plummeted.

‘S-surely not really because I said I don’t need it...?’

Was his relationship itself with the Familiar canceled? Thinking about it, Ark’s face blanched. Though he had gotten angry and snapped at Snake, who had disobeyed him, he didn’t really mean it. Of course! There was no way he meant it, right?

Snake's item storage function couldn't be traded for even several hundred Gold. No, no! What was important wasn't an issue of function.

The emotion Ark felt towards his Familiars was special. It wasn't important now that they were simply helpful in the game. Loyal Skull, Dedric, who always became Ark's strength in the moment of crisis even as he complained incessantly, and Snake, who thought of Ark as a parent.

Though he had never expressed it, they were no longer just Familiars to him, they were friends who couldn't be replaced with anything. To the point that he couldn't even imagine a New World without them...

"Snake, get ahold of yourself. I'm, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. It was something I just said because I was angry! Are you telling me there's a parent anywhere in the world who would throw away his child? You can't disappear, take strength. I'll forgive it all so please... please get ahold of yourself! I need you!"

Ark constantly cast the Nursing skill with a shaking voice. In that moment, he felt something slip from his hands. It was Snake. Snake had slipped out and had fallen to the ground, leaving only skin in Ark's hands.

Surprisingly, Snake's scales had regained their former luster and were glossy again. Also, didn't Snake also have a red stripe on it that hadn't been there before? That wasn't all. As if amazed by its own transformation, Snake stared around dazedly before opening its mouth, as if it felt something there. When it did so, two sharp fangs, one on each side, were revealed. It had only been a snake in name until now, and it hadn't even had any fangs.

But those changes didn't matter to Ark just then. "Snake, Snake! You rascal, do you know how worried I was?"

Ark abruptly embraced Snake. Snake flinched, confused, before sniffing as it rubbed its body on Ark.

Hiss, hiss hiss hiss...

"It's fine, I'll forgive you now. Who cares if it's a sword or a tome? It's okay, it might sell for more than the sword. That's right. Let's think like that."

Hiss?

Snake flinched as it lifted its head.

It was then that a message window popped up in front of Ark.

– The tome ‘Deadly Poison Preparation’ has been digested within Alamone Larvae.

“What? Digested? Does that mean it’s gone?”

Alamone Larvae’s metamorphosis has been completed successfully.

A mysterious snake that lives in the Netherworld, whose state hasn’t been completely disclosed.

The Alamone Larvae will undergo metamorphosis several times until it reaches adulthood. When started by a special magic ingredient, metamorphosis will end with the learning of a new skill. The Alamone’s adult appearance and characteristics will be determined based on the skills it learns during metamorphosis.

Alamone Larvae digested a tome and has acquired the skill ‘Deadly Poison.’ Influenced by the skill it learned during metamorphosis, it has evolved into ‘Poison Alamone.’

Poison Alamone

The Poison Alamone has the special ability of producing deadly poison inside its body by refining poisonous plants. However, the Alamone cannot use the deadly poison itself. In exchange, it will temporarily add a deadly poison effect if applied to any kind of weapon belonging to the summoner.

The number of uses and additional effects of the deadly poison will differ depending on the kind of poisonous plant. In addition, it will be able to refine poisonous plants of higher grades as the skill grows, and deadly poison of a higher grade will have an increased number of uses and greater effects.

However, Alamone currently only has one skill slot. Only one skill can be loaded. In order to use the item storage function, the deadly poisoning skill must be removed and the item storage function must be reloaded. Skill swapping is possible at any time if there were no items being stored inside the Alamone’s body.

Race	Creature of the Netherworld	Alignment	Dark
Class	—	Health	50
Loyalty	—	Strength	—
Agility	—	Stamina	—
Wisdom	—	Intelligence	—
Luck	—		

* Usable Skills: Item Storage, Deadly Poison Preparation

*Currently Loaded Skill: Deadly Poison (Beginner, Passive)

‘???’

‘Huh?’

Ark read the message with a dazed expression. It felt like he had been hit in the back of the head with a hammer. Come to think of it, why hadn’t he thought of that? The easiest way to learn a skill was obviously a tome. But he had just thought there would be some kind of special method at the words “metamorphosis” — he hadn’t been able to think of tomes, the most sensible option.

“You... you knew that tome was Deadly Poison?”

Snake nodded with uneasy eyes.

‘So that’s how it was. That’s why Snake was being so annoying in the repository.’

Only then did Ark grasp the gist of the situation. Well yeah, there was no way Snake would have disobeyed him without a reason when Snake considered him its parent. He was certain that Snake had known instinctively that the tome was an item it needed as soon as it discovered it. If he thought about the actions Snake had shown him thus far, what happened afterwards was obvious. It had probably thought that it could be useful even in battle if it swallowed the tome. That’s why it had prepared to be cursed and had gulped down the tome. Because it was Snake. Ark could guess that because it was Snake.

‘Goodness gracious. I can’t even thoughtlessly scold it since its intention is way too obvious...’

Ark stood up with a severe expression. “Alright. I said I would forgive you, so let’s just say this didn’t happen. It seems to all appearances like a useful skill, but next time you can’t eat anything without my permission again. Understood?”

After saying it, it really seemed like something a parent would tell their child.

Hiss hiss, hiss hiss hiss!

Snake nodded in quick succession as it wrapped itself around Ark’s waist and charmingly rubbed itself on him.

In the end, Ark dropped the charges on Snake. He was particularly weak towards Snake.

'I can't hate it because its like this.'

At that, the Dedric who had been on the verge of tears when Snake had become strange soon burst out in complaint. "Che! What's with the discrimination! When I did something bad, you beat me up like crazy for several days and nights..."

"So that's why I'm telling you to behave properly at all times."

"What did I do?! Is there a Familiar as nice as me?"

"Are you going to keep talking back? You're starting to feel hungry, I see?"

"Ah, Master. Who said anything? Skull, was it you? Did you defy Master?"

Clack clack, cla-cla-clack!

Skull stared at Dedric with pitying eyes, as if saying 'why did you act up if you were going to just dig your own grave like that.'

At any rate, he had paid a big price and Snake's metamorphosis had ended with this.

'Let's hurry and get out of here. I feel like there's just going to be more foolishness if we stay here. I'll know how useful the Deadly Poison skill is after I check it, but what's done is done, so let's just cleanly forget it.'

Ark recalled Skull and Dedric and left the Magic Institute.

"Selling level 40-60 items cheaply! Buying accessories!"

"I'm seriously quitting the game today. I'm taking care of my items so use this chance to get your equipment."

"Recruiting party members who will stay up all night with us. Two spots left. Cleric wanted!"

"Seeking level 70 merc! Payment will be determined later!"

As soon as Ark left the Magic Institute, he was greeted by the sounds of the main street. Hundreds of players were using Shout to do business or look for parties, so it was a complete uproar. But for Ark, who had no interest in shopping for items or parties, it didn't matter.

'Alright, now what?'

Ark summed up the situation as he went through the market. The quests Ark currently had were « Find New Settlers » and « Find the Heartsoul Bead ». And although it didn't have anything to do with the quests, he had to find the Three Marvels. But he still had too little information to seek the Three Marvels, and he'd have to spend a lot of time finding settlers for the quest. In that case, there was only one thing he could do right now.

Hunt down the thief gang around Giran to solve the Magic Institute's quest.

'The problem is where to start...'

Having opened up the map, he couldn't tell where to go. Simply put, it would be in Giran's vicinity. Giran was 3-4 times larger than Jackson. Naturally, the area that could be called Giran's vicinity was just as big.

From the Brandt Mountains in the North and all the way to the Argus Mountains in the South, all of it was within Giran's vicinity. It was near impossible to find the thief gang in such a large area. Even so, he couldn't just grab an NPC and ask them, either...

'Might there not be a way to easily find out the location of the thief gang?'

He was able to find that method surprisingly easily.

The answer was the message board placed in one side of the square. Information about the nearby villages or events were posted on the message board. However, it played another role besides that. Information about Chaotic players or thief NPCs with bounties on their heads! He had just passed by that information until now because of his lack of interest. Perhaps because Giran was a large city, the message board was 3-4 times larger than normal. Also, the information was managed separately in categories like Trade, Regional, and Event.

Ark searched the board where the WANTED bounty posters were put up. 'Are these all the WANTED bounty criminals?'

Dozens of wanted posters with bounties were filling up the large board.

'Eh? This guy is...?'

Ark was able to find an unexpected face among the wanted.

Leo (Foreigner)
A thief who habitually plunders Merchants in the vicinity of Giran. Masterful at telling lies; requires particular caution.

Area last seen : Grey Ridge

Difficulty: ???

Bounty: 40 Gold

Bounty payer : Bambino (Foreigner)

‘This fellow, is he still thieving?’

Ark grinned. Leo was the guy who had tried to rob Ark when he was first crossing over to Giran, but got served instead. However, he must have been unable to snap out of his misdeeds and continued to steal, because his WANTED bounty poster which even had a bold likeness drawn on it was taking up a spot on the message board.

Since a bounty of 40 Gold was 400,000 Won (~\$400) in real currency, it wasn't a trifling sum. It seemed Leo had incurred quite a lot of resentment from the player named Bambino.

If the authorities accepted a player's request and a bounty was put on them, a WANTED bounty criminal would automatically be locked up in prison if they died at the hands of a hunter. Then they would have to pay a fine and stay imprisoned for a number of days to get rid of their Chaotic status before they were released. In other words, if you were unlucky enough to get caught, it would be a pain in the ass. Because of that, there were many cases where people were careful not to incur too much resentment even if they did a Chaotic deed. It seemed Leo really didn't have any tact. Though well, it was obvious from just seeing that he had tried to take all of Sid's trade goods.

In any case, Ark had no interest in the likes of Leo. Ark was interested in thief NPCs, and not just any old heinous thief gang, either.

The Grey Axe Gang (Group)

A thief gang composed of 7 Warriors. Will be rewarded with the bounty if you take down the gang's boss and bring back his grey axe.

Place last seen: Near Rodellin Village in northwestern Giran.

Difficulty: E

Bounty: 15 Gold.

Bounty payer: Giran Guard.

The Silver Arrow (Group)

A cutthroat thief gang composed of about 10 people. Will be rewarded with the bounty if you take down the gang's boss and bring back his bow as proof.
--

Place last seen: Old Forest in southern Giran.
--

Difficulty: F

Bounty: 10 Gold

Bounty payer: Giran Guard.

Unlike the other WANTED bounty posters that were, for the most part, already torn away, the thief gangs had barely been touched. In fact, among the WANTED bounty criminals, the most popular ones were the Chaotic players. If a Chaotic player died, they dropped an equipment item with a 100% chance. Since you could secure a bounty on top of that, you could expect a jackpot. The next most popular were the named monsters becoming well known in a nearby region, because depending on the case, you could get a fairly useful item.

On the other hand, the thief gangs had no merit to speak of. It was hard to subjugate them because they were high in numbers, but there was little chance that a useful item might come out since their overall levels were low. Despite that, the bounty was only 10-20 Gold, so there was no reason to struggle to catch them.

'It's comfortable if I don't have any competition.'

Ark tore off the wanted poster of the thief gang that looked the easiest.

– A new bountied criminal has been registered in your information window.

You have participated in bounty hunting for the first time.

Bounty hunting starts when you register a WANTED bounty poster on the city message board. If you take part and take them down, you will receive the bounty and your city contribution will rise. When your Hunter Rank goes up according to your contribution, you will be able to acquire information regarding stronger wanted criminals and will also be paid various kinds of different rewards.
--

However, the registration will be canceled if you perish while the bountied criminal
--

is registered, and you can start hunting again after re-registering in the village. In addition, there is a 60% chance that you will lose an equipment item due to the special 'Looting' characteristic of the thieves.

Ark's current Hunter Rank is —.

The usual point was that he had to go back to the village and register again if he died after registering. Therefore, if he went and died while getting rid of the thief gang, he would have to start from the very beginning.

He also hadn't been aware that his city contribution would rise if he caught a wanted criminal. A Merchant raised city contribution through trade, but it seemed a combat profession raised contribution with a method like this.

There was a surprising amount of depth to the world of a bounty hunter, too.

'How fun. Shall I try it once in earnest?'

He would receive bounty money and get information as he hunted, and he could even raise city contribution. Once he thought of it in that way, his motivation surged greatly.

'I'll be eating the pheasant, eating its eggs, *and* using its nest to kindle a fire!'

Ark's life in Giran began.

Act 2 : Bounty Hunter

Ark didn't have much knowledge about the Giran region yet. Even when he spread out the map and looked at it, it was almost completely covered in black fog. He had first come to Giran through the Grey Ridge shortcut, and after that he had lived holed up in the blind auction house. Then, the event quest had started right afterwards, so he had no time to hunt. That's why he stopped by a General Store before leaving Giran to buy some maps. In the case of large cities like Giran, if you bought a map with the geography and information about nearby hunting grounds, new info would be added automatically.

Based on that information, there was a diversity in hunting grounds around Giran. There were forest, plains, swamp, and mountain regions, and depending on the region, the monsters that appeared varied vastly and ranged from level 50-100 as

well. This was a perfect place for low leveled players to level up after leaving Jackson Territory.

‘Let’s see. The Old Forest where the Silver Arrow thief gang is...’

When he checked the map, it was marked as a level 60-80 area.

‘It’s a reasonable level.’

Ark was currently level 78. He felt it was a bit easy, since he had hunted monsters stronger than him until now, but since his goals were information collection and bounty hunting anyway, the easier it was, the better.

Ark moved to his destination along the road. When he travelled on a paved road, an additional effect of +20% movement speed was added. Therefore, he could minimize travel time. Thanks to that, Ark reached his destination in just 30 minutes.

Trees of enormous width were packed closely in the Old Forest, where the Silver Arrow thief gang was hiding.

“It’s meat...! Fresh... human meat!”

When he entered the forest, three Trolls appeared as if they had been waiting. Ark’s eyes flashed.

‘This is good. I wanted to try out the Deadly Poison skill before I encounter the thief gang.’

“Grrrrrr, DIE!”

Claaang!

Shrieking, a Troll swung its club. But, being in the early level 70s, the Troll was already no match for Ark.

“Dedric, Skull. Buy me some time.”

“Huhuhu, playing with such a slow fellow is no problem.”

Clack clack clack!

Dedric and Skull replied confidently as they attacked the Troll. With that opening, Ark dodged the club with light footwork and fell back. Then he fed Snake the ingredients he had confirmed as poisonous, having gathered them since entering the

forest. A short while afterwards, light blue fluid flowed out of Snake's fangs. It was venom made with the Deadly Poison Production skill.

Swish, ka-chink!

When he spread the venom on the blade, the blade's surface turned blue with an eerie sound effect.

You have applied Neurotoxin (Beginner) to Lancel's Sword.

If the enemy is hit with an attack, the nerves of the struck region will be paralyzed for 5 seconds (5 uses).

"Dedric, Skull. Distract the other guys now!"

Having applied the poison, Ark flexed his muscles before flying out like an arrow.

The Troll swung its club with a roar. However, Ark had faced the irregular attacks of Shadows at Jackson not long ago. He could dodge the incomparably slow Troll's attack with his eyes closed. Ark twisted his head to dodge the club as he stabbed horizontally with his sword. A Counter Attack burst out in that instant as the Troll swayed to one side.

– The Troll's left leg has been paralyzed by Neurotoxin!

Paralyzed in one leg, the Troll retreated while limping very pitifully. But Ark wasn't one to spare a monster because it was pitiful. He immediately rammed his sword into the Troll's other leg. Then, when he let loose a sidekick as he dodged the club, the Troll with both legs paralyzed flailed both its arms before falling over. It was in a perfectly defenseless state!

Double Critical Chance activated.

"Dark Blade!"

After taking immense damage with a brilliant flash of light, the Troll disappeared.

It was the same for the two remaining Trolls. The Troll's arm would droop limply if he struck it with his sword. Occasionally, the spinal nerves were paralyzed when he dealt a critical hit to the body.

Of course, the activation rate wasn't 100%. Perhaps because it was Beginner Deadly Poison, the success rate was roughly 20%. The rate was slightly higher than succeeding a kick with high difficulty.

But there was a point that Ark hadn't thought of. In the case of kicks, large monsters like Trolls almost never got status hexes. But the poison activated at a pretty high rate even when facing large monsters. In addition, it wasn't random like a kick; a specific status condition could be dealt by choice.

This had a considerable effect. Ark took down three Trolls in just 2 minutes.

"Isn't this surprisingly useful?"

In battle, even a single second couldn't be ignored. Especially when in a crisis, the few seconds it took to drink a potion could decide victory or defeat. So if the enemy could be paralyzed for 5 seconds at a 20% chance, there was nothing more to say. Moreover, an enemy could be paralyzed for a maximum of 15 seconds since it could be used five times.

'I've always got the ingredients on hand, especially since I don't use poisonous ingredients that often. In other words, I can use this whenever I need it!'

Having thought that far, Ark completely forgot the likes of the frost attribute sword. Unlike a sword that he would simply sell off after using it when he got a better item, he could make use of a skill for a long time once he learned it. If it was a useful skill, then it could be better than a Rare item and wasn't bad at all.

'This skill might even be more useful than the Rare sword!'

Humming, Ark scraped up all the poisonous ingredients around and tested them one by one. However, because it was still a Beginner skill, he could only make venom from ingredients with weak poison. Most of the effects were just so-so, but there a few useful ones.

Hesitation Poison, which reduced the enemy's movements by 30% for 5 seconds, Acid Poison, which dealt 30 damage every 10 seconds for one minute, and Vulnerability Poison, which reduced the enemy's defense by 20% for 10 seconds. It was hard to expect absolute effects, but it was more or less fine to use them as support.

However, it wasn't a skill he should recklessly overuse, because the effect didn't apply the same way to every monster. For example, it had a low activation rate on large monsters and the duration was slightly shorter as well. But the Thorny Plant Poison that caused Bleeding actually raised activation rate and lengthened duration. Whereas, if he used Acid Poison on a monster with the acid attribute, it would heal rather than damage.

'In other words, it means I have to determine the monster's attribute well before using it!'

He would study the monster and attack it with a more effective poison. The skill suited Ark's fighting style.

If there was one drawback, it was that it had poor cost to product ratio. There was a limit to ingredients, and there were times when poisonous herbs were needed to use Survival Cooking. He couldn't just make them all into poison. In addition, poison had a usage limit, unlike kicks. Once the poison was applied, the usage count would decrease whether it was blocked or wasted.

'But that too is up to me. There isn't a skill that matches me 100%. To expect something like that is just being greedy.'

No technique is perfect. For balance, of course they all had their own weaknesses. Using that properly was the player's skill!

"Okay, Snake. I like it. You did well."

Hiss hiss!

As Ark grinned for a change, the color returned to Snake's face. Then Dedric grumbled with a very displeased expression. "Tsk, tsk, tsk!"

"What? Do you have a complaint?"

"No, I don't! What complaint would I have towards the distinguished Snake when all I have is a talent for flying? I'll just quietly do some recon, jeez." Dedric sharply turned his head as he flapped away.

At that sight, Ark held back a wry smile. Dedric pretended not to be, but he really was very jealous.

As Ark's party meandered through the forest while quarreling, at some point the monster spawns suddenly became sparse. Ark knew what such a change meant from experience. He had entered a boundary where the monster domain had changed. But this time, it wasn't just a simple monster. It was probably the Silver Arrow thief gang's turf.

'Come to think of it, this is the first time I'll be facing a human.'

Not humanoid monsters, but real humans. Since this was a realistic virtual reality, the feeling shouldn't be different, though once he thought of it like that, he started to

feel pretty uncomfortable. Actually, there was really no reason for him to be uneasy since he had already killed Leo and Andel before.

‘A thief gang isn’t much different from monsters anyways.’

Ark was thinking like that and moving forward when he thought he heard a sharp whistle. A crimson light burst out before his eyes. Looking down, he saw a thick arrow quivering in his shoulder.

– You have been ambushed. 200 damage. Your shoulder has been wounded, so attack speed will be decreased by 10%.

“Hehehe, we’ve got good luck today. A guest has crawled in with his own legs.”

“It’s been tough ‘cause we haven’t had profit for a while, we’re grateful for this guest.”

“Then we should entertain him.”

“Kekeke, though of course, it’s our way of entertaining.”

‘Dang... is this the Silver Arrow thief gang?’ Ark glanced around himself with shocked eyes.

The tree branches were so dense that he couldn’t see the sky. He heard the voices of the thieves from somewhere up there. And not just from one place, but all around... they were already in place.

He’d gotten so caught up in testing the Deadly Poison skill that he became careless.

‘Even so, to think they would go as far as to lie in ambush...’

No, it was natural if he thought about it with common sense. His opponents were a thief gang in name, so there was no way they wouldn’t guard the area around their hideout. But Ark hadn’t thought that far since he had only thought of them as monsters. In any case, Ark wasn’t particularly worried even though the situation wasn’t that good.

‘The Silver Arrow thief gang’s difficulty was F. Their average level is probably only in the 70s. If it’s only that level, there’s no need to worry much.’

“Dedric, second tree on the right!”

“Okay!”

As Ark pointed to one tree, Dedric answered excitedly as he flew off. Then, with a “bam” sound, one of the thieves screamed as he tumbled off the tree.

“Aack, wh-what the hell? This bat is-?”

“Shut up, I am a noble of the Netherworld, Dedric-nim!”

“Plan A! Skull, let’s go!”

Ark ran at the thief with Skull. But just as he was about to swing his sword, four arrows shot at him from all directions. Ark hastily turned his sword, but even with reflexes trained through Taekwondo, it was impossible to parry four arrows in an instant.

“Argh!”

An arrow lodged into his abdomen and leg yet again.

Hexed with ‘Bleeding’ and then ‘Reduced Movement Speed,’ while Ark was staggering, the thief that had fallen off hurriedly scrambled up the tree.

“That bastard, isn’t he commanding monsters?”

“Don’t be caught off guard. Seeing as he’s holding on even after being hit by arrows, he’s not an easy one.”

“Let’s get rid of that bat first!”

“Concentrate attack on the bat!”

“Dedric, dodge! Plan D!”

“Ah, alright! Ack, what the hell is this?”

At Ark’s voice, Dedric hurriedly soared into the sky. But before he could fly even a few meters, he got caught in something and flapped. He had been caught by the crude trap of the entangled, dense branches above Ark’s head.

“Kikikik, idiot. How embarrassing.”

Bam! Bam! Bam!

The thieves laughed as they launched their arrows. Caught in the tree branches and rendered unable to move, Dedric was hit by three or four arrows in an instant and

fell into critical condition. Flying creatures were vulnerable to ranged attacks like arrows, so he took 30% additional damage.

“Dammit, unsummon Dedric!”

Ark barely prevented Dedric from being force recalled by unsummoning him. But then the situation became even more difficult. All the attacks that had headed towards Dedric were concentrated on Ark. Lacking a ranged attack skill, there was nothing Ark could do since they were shooting arrows from atop the trees. Ark rolled on the ground as he blocked and dodged the arrows flying at him crazily from all over the place.

However, it was impossible to avoid all the arrows. He took one hit from every three to four shots, and his situation only worsened because he was hexed with Slow or Bleeding whenever he got hit.

The thieves even acted cunningly.

“I’m next!”

Hearing sound from behind him, he quickly turned around, and an arrow lodged into his back.

“The idiot looked back. Kikik.”

“What kind of dickhead would point out where each and every arrow would fly from?”

“Hey, this time I’ll attack. Try and block this!”

“Shut up!”

‘Do you think I’d fall for that one a second time?’... was what he thought, but when he didn’t even turn his head, this time an arrow really did come flying in. After taking a few attacks like that, red-hot anger surged in him.

Who would have even thought of it? That he would take attacks while being teased by thief NPCs.

‘Argh, th-these bastards...’

Ark ground his teeth. But no amount of grinding his teeth would improve the situation.

Ark struck a tree with Dark Blade in rage. He was trying to shake a thief loose from the tree. But being a few meters in diameter, the tree didn't even budge.

'Damn it, the hell am I supposed to do?'

He also tried to climb up a tree, but even that wasn't easy because of the thieves' arrow attacks. He only ended up getting hit stupidly by a few arrows before retreating.

Of course, Skull was no help at all. There was no way Skull, who rolled along the ground, could crawl up a tree that even Ark couldn't climb. It also couldn't take the arrows cutting through the air in Ark's stead. In the end, there was no difference whether Skull was there or not. Maybe for that reason, the thieves paid no attention to Skull. While Ark and Skull ran around in confusion like that, his Health was cut down bit by bit and he fell into critical condition.

'No, I can't die against these guys!'

Urgency filled Ark's face.

His opponents weren't ordinary monsters. If he died at the hands of the thief NPCs, there was a 60% chance that he would drop an equipment item.

'I'm angry, but surviving is the first priority!'

"Unsummon Skull!"

Ark returned Skull back to the Netherworld and began to flee.

"You think we'd lose a fish that's already caught?"

The thieves were really not to be taken lightly. They used the vines hanging everywhere in the forest to move from branch to branch like Tarzan as they shot arrows.

Ark slipped between the trees while dodging the arrows, but in the end he took yet another arrow to his knee and collapsed.

"Got him!"

"Finish it!"

'Arghh, dammit... Am I really going to die from level 70 thieves?'

Ark was grinding his teeth while watching the bandits approach when he suddenly spotted a familiar object on the branch the thieves were moving towards. It was a brown object that looked like a rugby ball hanging upside down on the tree branch. Ark knew what that object was.

They were honeybees that inhabited the forests of New World, a Red Bee beehive.

In his beginner days of struggling in the Argus Mountains, there was a time when he almost died after finding out that a top-level ingredient, honey, could be acquired from the Red Bee beehive and recklessly rushed in.

‘Good, with this it’s all or nothing!’

“Summon Skull! In the end, I can only depend on you!”

Ark grabbed Skull and threw him with all his strength. Skull flew out in a straight line and hit the beehive. Afterwards, the beehive shook greatly and then Red Bees began to pour out in droves. Buzzing with aggressive cries, when the Red Bees poured out, the thieves’ faces blanched.

“Shit, Red Bees!”

“R-run away! It’s the end if you get caught!”

“Aaaaah!”

As the Red Bees rushed in, the thieves screamed as they fled in all directions. One of them was attacked by the Red Bees and fell to the ground. Then the Red Bees swarmed in like clouds and lowered his Health to the bottom in an instant.

In the meantime, Ark sent Skull back to the Netherworld and ran into the forest. Belatedly discovering Ark, the Red Bees swarmed towards him.

Ark had fallen into critical condition, so the Indomitable skill series and Adrenaline effects were activated. Thanks to that, his movement speed had increased dramatically, but he couldn’t lose the Red Bees completely. The buzzing sound closed in on him until it was right behind him.

‘It was somewhere around here, wasn’t it...?’

Ark tore through the forest like crazy. After a few minutes had passed like that, the forest suddenly disappeared and an expansive lake appeared. It was a lake he had discovered not long after entering the Old Forest.

‘Alright, found it!’

Ark immediately jumped into the lake.

“Whew ...!”

The Red Bees milled around above the surface for 10 minutes before leaving. If there hadn't been a lake nearby and if he hadn't had the Mermaid Scale, he would have died without a squeak.

Firstly, Ark recovered his Health while making and eating food.

“Dammit! That hurt, IT FRICKIN HURT! Those bastards! I won't forgive them!”
Resummoned, Dedric flew about in rage.

Ark felt the same way.

Thinking about the battle just now, he suddenly recalled an unpleasant memory from when he was young. It was right when he'd entered elementary school. Ark had been a very withdrawn child. And at that age, there was always a brat who bullied such kids. There were punks like that in Ark's class, too.

The brats harassed Ark whenever they could. Most of it was just hiding his shoes or eating his lunch, but there was one joke that made him mad even when he thought of it now.

It was a joke where 3-4 kids would steal his bag and pass it around, taunting him to take it back. If he ran towards one kid it would be passed to another kid, and if he ran to get it once more it would again be passed... Someone who hadn't experienced it wouldn't know the feeling.

He had felt exactly that way when he was getting toyed with by the thief NPCs. A truly incomparably dirty feeling!

‘Those bastards... I'll annihilate them no matter what it takes!’

Ark ground his teeth tightly with terrifying eyes. At that sight, Dedric and Skull got scared and shrank away.

“Hiik, w-what's wrong? I did what you told me to do, Master!”

Cla-clack, clack clack clack!

“I know, don't throw a fit and be quiet!”

When Ark yelled at them, Dedric and Skull slinked away carefully and flattened themselves in a corner.

He raised his temper at the Familiars, but Ark knew it wasn't their fault. He wasn't generous enough to defend someone else's mistake, but he also wasn't as narrow-minded as to blame others for his mistakes. He only had himself to blame for the insufferable humiliation from this battle.

'I've got no excuse.'

Actually, Ark had been a little conceited all this time. After changing his profession, Ark had always fought enemies with higher levels than him. 5-10 levels was the usual, and sometimes he even hunted monsters 20 levels higher than him. In addition, he took down boss monsters that he shouldn't have been able to even touch at his level. Moreover, he got 1st in contribution in the event quest at level 70.

While doing all the things he wanted to do, Ark had forgotten the most important thing.

It was nothing new, but in New World, level wasn't everything.

The competence of the player controlling the character was more important than the level. The reason why Ark had grown faster than others was because he had realized that early on and had refined and polished himself without rest, and because he didn't neglect putting effort into making use of realizations from real life in the game. But at some point, he began to neglect that effort. It wasn't that he didn't work hard to exercise. Like before, he was still working out for two hours every day to the extent of getting muscle pains. The problem was that he had neglected finding out how he could apply the results of the exercise to Ark. He had also neglected research on ways to learn or use new skills. Satisfied with his current self, he hadn't improved.

'I was too easy-going. Because the monsters I've fought up until now have been easy, I thought it would stay that way. But it's a game. I can't fight the same monsters forever.'

There was an absolute, immutable law in all games.

The higher your level went, the harder the battles would become.

If you leveled up, of course you would become that much more powerful. But the monsters you'd have to face at a high level were even stronger. In addition, they would gain various characteristics, making them even trickier to face. In other words, as your level grew, you needed more precise control and a greater understanding of the game. Of course, it didn't matter if he was satisfied with the monsters he was hunting now, but...

'If I'm to make money with the game, I'll always need to be ahead of the others.'

Ark was playing the game to join Global Exos and to make a living. Others invested money in order to play New World, but Ark had to do the opposite, make money off it.

Wasn't it obvious that he had to be one step ahead of everyone?

If the majority of players sold their level 30 items after reaching level 40, of course they wouldn't make any money. You had to sell a level 45 item at the very least to make money. And to do that, you'd have to take down stronger monsters before other people did and finish quests of a higher level.

'I was out of my mind. For me, the game is my job. It's not bad to enjoy the game, but I can't lose sight of my objective because of that enjoyment. If I'm to do better than others, I have to do more and work harder. I can't just play the game for fun.'

Ark clenched his teeth.

'What's important right now isn't the quest or leveling up. My level right now is 78. I'm not level 40. So I have to bring my skills up to match my level 78 character. That is what I have to do right now. Alright, this is actually good. There's no need to think of anything else. My only goal right now is the thief gang!'

The thief gang was no longer simply part of acquiring a clue for a quest. It was a mountain he had to overcome in order to get stronger.

The thief gang went beyond their level and were of a higher difficulty than other monsters. It was natural. The AI that applied to every monster was matched to the monster's intelligence level. But the bandits were human, so of course they would have higher intelligence than regular monsters, and their level of cooperation was also high. But with his Familiars, Ark was in fact no different from a party. If the difference between them and the thief gang had been this great, then the problem was teamwork!

'The most pressing thing is how I use my Familiars.'

The Familiars were now a part of Ark. Looking at the ratio in battle, if Ark was 60%, then the Familiars occupied 40%. In other words, the abilities of the Familiars became Ark's strength in battle; in order to face enemies that used cooperative play like the thief gang, they absolutely needed to level up their teamwork.

'There's a limit to the simple operations we've used until now. We'll use this chance to reinforce the operations a little so that we can deal with more complicated situations.'

It had been A, B, C, and D until now. They had only used four plans. Of course they were as effective as they were simple, but if the number of monsters increased and the situation became more complex, it limited their maneuverability.

‘We need an operation that’s a bit more methodical and mutually beneficial.’

Ark’s strong point was that he could immediately immerse himself in thought.

However, the only operations Ark knew were the ones he had experienced in FPS (First Person Shooter) or RTS (Real-time Strategy) games. After struggling and racking his brains for a long time to think of a plan, he found a way. It was the battle professional who had been sent to South America to train SWAT, JusticeMan.

Hadn’t he already seen how powerful JusticeMan’s tactics had been in Jackson?

Finishing his thoughts there, Ark immediately logged out and called JusticeMan.

“Strategy? What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

“I really need it. Do you have anything that could help?”

“Well... I do have something. But the textbook I have is too high level. It’s only got things that are hard to understand even for people who came back from the army.”

“Isn’t there a textbook for learning the basics?”

“Ah, I do have one. I don’t know if it’ll help, but I’ll send it to you.”

Just like when he first made the plans, his training opponents were the slow Trolls. Ark used Dedric to lure out Trolls one at a time to try out various operations.

“Plan A-4!”

When Ark gave the command, the Familiars attacked the Troll sufficiently while luring it to the back. After luring the Troll to a remote place like that, they switched to A-1 and Dedric and Skull split to the left and right as they besieged the Troll. When they did so, the Troll floundered, unable to decide on who to attack. Since the attacks weren’t focused they were also easy to dodge. In addition, since they were all on different sides, one out of the three was always able to deal a Backstab.

A-2 was a series of attacks where they would strike and back off instantaneously. This was for when the enemy was strong; it helped preserve Health. Also, A-3 was a useful operation when facing a quick monster, where all three of them attacked at once. When Snake’s Deadly Poison skill was thrown in properly on top of that, the effect was multiplied.

Like that, Ark used all the A operations to hunt the monsters in the area. And once they reached a level of familiarity with it, he trained them on the B operations.

Of course, the general training went on in Spartan style.

“Skull, you were a few seconds slow in changing operations this time. Food punishment!”

“Kekeke, I knew it. Well yeah, could a skull without a brain even memorize them properly anyways?”

“Dedric, don’t act up. Food punishment for you, too!”

“EHH? W-why me?”

“Didn’t I tell you? From now on, it’s shared responsibility.”

“Ridiculous, this is violence!”

“I told you, right? I like violence.”

Ark opened the Familiars’ mouths and crammed in food. There were a lot of new ingredients because they had never been to the Old Forest before. This was actually JusticeMan’s suggestion. When establishing teamwork, wasn’t it best to brand them with shared responsibility?

A specialist was indeed different. Thanks to him, the two Familiars put their heads together and whispered whenever they could even when Ark didn’t say anything. They didn’t want to be hit by a bolt out of the blue because of the other guy. It was a bit oppressive, but it seemed that the Familiars had finally begun to think in terms of the ‘all for one, one for all’ idea. In any case, through training and punishment, the Familiars’ combat ability increased rapidly once again.

Also, the increase in punishments led directly to the rise in the proficiency of Survival Cooking. And then—!

“Yuck, wha-what is this? It tastes hella bad!”

The food you have made with Survival Cooking is ‘Appetite Killing Stew.’

It smells and looks fine, but it tastes so awful that when eaten, it will cause trauma. It will make the eater lose their appetite and they won’t even want to look at food, no matter how fragrant, for a while. Perfect dieting effect!

The taster will become unable to eat any kind of food for 2 hours. If they force themselves to eat, they will vomit and lose the effects of previously eaten food instead.

The moment when Bat crawled out of the pot and threw up, the skill finally leveled up.

Through much experience, Survival Cooking rank has gone up.

Survival Cooking (Advanced, Passive) : You used various ingredients scattered in nature to make countless new foods. Thanks to your limitless spirit of inquiry and appetite for cooking, you have finally become a Survival Cooking expert.

You can now draw out 100% of the hidden effects in ingredients. Also, the expiration date, additional effects, and the penalties have risen greatly.

As an Advanced bonus, you can make the special dish 'Medley.'

*Medley: Makes a new dish, a 'Medley,' by mixing 2 kinds of dishes together. The Medley dish will mix the characteristics of the two dishes and increase the additional effect, or may even nullify the penalty. Sometimes, a completely different form of additional effect that is impossible with normal dishes will form at random.

However, food made with Medley will not be saved as a new recipe. If there are dishes in your bag that are taking up space but are too regretful to eat or throw away, daringly making them into Medleys wouldn't be bad either...

Survival Cooking, indeed!

Ark hadn't only made food with good effects this whole time. Since there was a limit to the kinds of ingredients, sometimes there were times when he made dishes that he knew would have penalty effects out of necessity to raise his proficiency, and he had to throw away those dishes while holding back tears. One wouldn't know how wasteful it was to have to waste perfectly good ingredients to make trashy food.

'But now I can recycle the trashy food by making them into Medleys!'

Ark immediately pulled out his useless dishes and tried making Medleys. After putting two dishes in the pot and activating the skill, a new dish was soon made with a bubbling sound effect.

You have made a Medley.

Soup of Horrifying Taste + Tea Tasting Like Steamed Rags = Essence of Fury

Possessing a taste that is hard to even describe, the person who eats this will experience extreme fury.

Fury +50, shouting volume will grow louder by 100%.

Since Medleys had random effects, he could find out the effect as soon as he made it, unlike Survival Cooking.

‘Fury?’

Like the Spiritual Power that Ark used when calling out his Familiars, Fury was a value that warrior professions consumed when using a special skill. Moreover, there was no knowing why the shouting volume increase effect had been made. In other words, it was an effect that Ark didn’t really need. However, Ark was quite satisfied with the result.

‘Soup of Horrifying Taste has a damage dealing effect. And Tea Tasting Like Steamed Rags is a food that actually consumes Mana. It’s not bad since useful food was made from mixing two dishes I would have had to toss anyways. And even if I make a Medley, Survival Cooking proficiency rises. Even if a bad dish comes out, it’s better than just throwing away food.’

After that, Ark experimented with this and that.

Foods made with Medley had random added effects. Even though the same result was still made at a high rate when he mixed food with the same formula, occasionally an entirely different dish was made as well. Though well, it didn’t make much difference anyways...

Since it was a hard-won technique, he attempted using it with great enthusiasm, but he didn’t make any really decent foods. For the most part, there were a lot of effects that gave off the... vague feeling that they were useful somewhere, or maybe not, like the Essence of Fury.

‘Well, it should be fine if I think about the purpose of these foods slowly. Since I’ve halved the foods I’ve been carrying around ’cause they were a shame to throw away and I’ve gotten some space in my bag, let’s pack them for now.’

If possible, he wanted to test it out a little more, but Ark currently didn’t have the breadth of mind. He could take his pot and use it at any time. But there was an appropriate time for training and that was now.

‘It’s my turn now.’

Ark had no thoughts of being satisfied with just the fact that his Familiars' combat ability had risen. Even if the importance of the Familiars had increased, it was still only 40%. The other 60% was Ark's share. Even if the Familiars got stronger, it wouldn't make sense if Ark didn't grow.

'Thanks to the training I did in the sea, the skills I learned in the beginning have mostly reached their peak. However, I can't use the new skills I've learned properly yet. The success rate of Parry and Counter's chain skill, Riposte, is especially too low. If I'm to face ranged attacks, I have to make these two skills completely mine.'

After thinking that, Ark sealed all his other skills. He only concentrated on activating Riposte by chaining Parry and Counter Attack. Of course, it was easier said than done. There was no proficiency to Riposte; it was a technique that had to be activated with the gamer's ability alone. In order to activate Riposte, he had to grasp the almost momentary timing between Parry and Counter Attack. It wasn't easy even if he got into position and aimed for just that moment. It also wasn't easy to activate it successfully with a risky position in a battle situation that constantly changed. Rather, he often ended up taking a hit from getting the 3 second paralyzation penalty upon failing to activate Riposte.

"It was a mess this time. I was only able to succeed with it twice!"

When that happened, Ark ate food. Naturally, he had to use new dishes for the growth of the Familiars, so he made and ate a dish that tasted awful from the ones already registered in his recipes. Ark was stern with others, but also equally stern with himself.

Dedric and Skull stared at him with horrified eyes.

"What a brutal master... he's scary, scary. Let's not be impudent with him anymore."

Clack clack clack.

Like that, the Silmido-level, extreme training went on for five, long days.

[T/N: A special military group called Unit 684 underwent hellish training for over three years on Silmido island for an infiltration mission into North Korea. This is the same island that was used for the membership training in Moonlight Sculptor.]

20 hours of training a day without going to a village even once!

As a result, Ark and the Familiars came to look completely like beggars. It was such a difficult time but it was definitely effective. The Familiars memorized all the

operations up to D-4, and their fellowship had become stronger as well. That wasn't all– Ark dragged the activation rate of Riposte up to 80%.

“Alright, now it's time for revenge.”

“Huhuhu, I've been waiting, Master.”

Clack clack clack!

Hiss hiss hiss!

With only evil left in them now, Ark and the Familiars' eyes gleamed with bloodthirst.

* * *

“Oho, it's a guest!”

“Huh? Isn't that fellow the one who ran away a while back?”

“He was alive?”

“Kekekeuk, he's braver than he looks, seeing as he's throwing away his life.”

“Then I oughta put an arrow in his head, as he wishes. 'Cause customer satisfaction is our motto.”

Once he crossed the boundary into their turf again, the bandits mocked him.

Soon afterwards, arrows began to pour from the tree tops.

“Dedric, Skull. Plan D-1.”

“I know.”

Dedric and Skull quickly went out in all directions. Unlike D, where they blindly fled, D-1 was an operation where they determined the location of the bandits and moved into blind spots, using rocks or trees as shields. Ark, however, exposed himself and blocked the arrows with the Parry skill ingrained in his body. After buying a few minutes or so of time, Ark whipped his body around and began to run away.

“Plan A-1!”

“Okay! Skull, come here!”

When Ark shouted, Dedric picked up Skull and cut through the forest.

“Eh? Those bastards are running away again?”

“Catch them! If we lose them again, it’ll be a disgrace to the Silver Arrows!”

The thieves yelled as they pursued on vines. When some time had passed like that, there was a crashing noise as the bandits who had been quickly narrowing the gap suddenly yelled while falling to the ground.

That was exactly what Ark was aiming for. Having found out that they moved from branch to branch, Ark had sliced the branches in the area beforehand. As a result, the branches broke as soon as the bandits jumped on top of them.

“Now, Snake!”

Hiss hiss hiss!

Craaash!

Snake opened its mouth wide. In that moment, an enormous number of leaves spewed from its mouth. As the leaves flew out in all directions, it was as if the forest was enveloped in a fog of leaves. It was yet another plan that Ark had prepared for just this moment. He had filled Snake’s belly up with leaves in advance for an attack that used Snake’s attribute of throwing up items!

“Urgh, w-what’s this?”

“Damn, where are they?”

With their vision blocked by the leaves that were pouring out like a rain shower, the bandits fell into confusion. That was when Ark and the Familiars leapt into the swirling leaves.

“Plan A-3!”

“Uhahaha, you bastards! Have a taste of this!”

At Ark’s shout, Dedric soared into the sky. Then he drew a steep arc as he plunged down like a lightning bolt. Struck on the top of his head, a thief hurriedly raised his bow. In that moment, Skull sprang up from a pile of leaves as it tore into the thief’s thigh. The bandit screamed as he staggered and the arrow went astray. That was the only attack the thief could attempt. Afterwards, Ark ran in and crammed successive critical hits on him, and the thief fell over without even a chance to shout.

“Snake, Neurotoxin!”

After destroying one of the thieves in an instant, Ark fed Snake an herb. Venom immediately pooled on Snake’s fangs.

Ark applied the Neurotoxin on his sword and went around all over the place, striking the arms of the bandits. The arms of three or four thieves became paralyzed and went limp. Once three or four thieves became unable to shoot arrows like that, it all fell into Ark’s pace from there.

“Th-these bastards...!”

The rogues moaned as they faltered.

A few of them urgently tried to go back up into the trees, but Ark wasn’t one to stand by and watch. He immediately unfurled operation C-3, and Dedric flew around in all directions as he stepped on the heads of the thieves. Skull also clamped onto their ankles and dragged them down. When they fell from the trees again, what was waiting for them was Ark’s sharp, blue sword.

“You would’ve played with me oh so well!”

Po-po-pow!

Stabbed in the back, the thieves undoubtedly took Backstab damage and staggered. In the end, they gave up on escaping up the trees and pulled out their daggers. Seeing their flashing blades, a chilly smile spread on Ark’s lips.

“You’re going to try facing me with blades? I’m thankful.”

Ark immediately dove in between the 3 rogues. Daggers were swung in every direction. But who was Ark? A strong, level 78 person who had trained his body day and night with Taekwondo.

Ark had been chased away by the thieves because of their arrow attacks. But if it was simple hack and slash close combat, Ark wouldn’t bat an eye even if he were surrounded by monsters over level 100, much less the likes of level 70 thieves...

Moreover, his opponents were human NPCs. It would be easier to predict their attacks with muscle movements than to try and do so with strange-looking monsters.

‘Time to strike!’

If a bandit raised his blade, Ark’s body would react more swiftly than expected. He would slip past the blade at an angle and unleash a front snap kick. Then he shot

forward as he went right up to his retreating opponent, and unfurled a knee kick and sword strike in rapid succession. Since he was pressed tightly to his opponent, the others couldn't easily swing their swords at him. This was a weakness formed within them because they were clever humans and not ignorant monsters.

Po-po-po-pow!

The three thieves went exploding off in all directions.

"Hiik!"

At that sight, the remaining thief let loose a choked scream. Seeing as he was wearing a stylish hat, unlike the other rogues, it seemed he was the boss of the thief gang. Perhaps because he thought he couldn't face Ark with a dagger after seeing him fight, the thief quickly pulled out his bow. Then he shot an arrow with practiced hands. As befitting of the boss, he must have used a special skill because the arrow was enveloped in black energy. However, Ark didn't even budge and stood right in its way, glaring at the arrow.

Then, the moment when the Arrow was about to lodge itself in Ark's neck—!

'Now!'

Ark's hand moved like a flash. He parried the arrow as if flinging it away with the tip of his sword, then fiercely stabbed with a chained movement.

The technique had become as fast and delicate as to parry away an arrow zipping in almost within the time it took to mark a decimal point and unleash a Counter Attack! He had practiced Riposte for five days to the extent of getting blisters on his hands for this moment. The arrow was an attack, so he had judged that he would be able to parry it and deal a counter. Lacking a way to deal with a ranged attack, this was the desperate measure Ark had cooked up.

The effect met his expectations. With the sound of metal, the arrow bounced off and lodged itself in the thief boss' face.

"Arrgghhh, how, how could such a thing...!"

The thief clutched his face and swung his dagger all over the place, but Ark wasn't one to get hit by such a blind blade. Ark, Dedric, and Skull soon ran in at him, and the bastard quickly turned into a cold corpse.

"Urrgggh, y-you bastard...!"

When the boss collapsed, he dropped a silver bow. Ark picked it up and a message window opened.

– You have killed the boss of the Silver Arrow thief gang.
If you take the evidence to the Giran Guard, you can claim your reward.

Within five days, he had finally taken care of the first bountied criminals.

“Uhahaha, how was that! This Dedric-nim’s skills!” Dedric leapt around as if he had annihilated the thief gang all on his own.

“Snake, skill change. Item Storage”

It was time to rake it in. Having annihilated the thief gang, Ark went around the area as he started packing away the items. Compared to normal monsters, the bandits dropped a considerable amount of japtem. Unlike monsters that only dropped things like leather or clubs, there were quite a few daggers or clothing equipment items. That wasn’t all— since they were thieves in name, all sorts of items emerged when he rooted through their hideout. The dishes and lanterns the thieves had used, and even the miscellaneous items they had gathered through thievery... Of course, there were only shoddy things that wouldn’t make much money since they weren’t high leveled thieves, but money was money. Ark even threw all the leftover food that the bandits had eaten into his bag.

‘This is more savory than I thought.’

After sweeping up every little copper the thieves had owned like that, Ark immediately moved to his next destination. His next objective was the Grey Axe Gang, which was said to have appeared in the area around Rodellin Village.

Unlike the Silver Arrow thief gang, it was composed of warrior professions. However, they were just as tricky to face. He had always thought of a party with various professions like Warriors, Archers, and Magicians in it to be ideal, but a Warrior party where everyone was armed with shields and axes was also stronger than he expected.

“Chop him up!”

With their shields in front of them, the Warriors surrounded Ark and swung their axes. They were also 5 levels higher than the Silver Arrow thief gang, putting them at 75. And it was no easy matter to take down even one of them because they had tremendous defense. However, Ark broke through the siege with Riposte and used the operation he had practiced with his Familiars to strike and back out as they took

care of the Warriors one at a time. When he downed the last Warrior, his level went up.

– You have leveled up.

He had leveled up within five days.

‘Now I know why people didn’t go for the thief gang bountied criminals.’

Annihilating a thief gang was three to four times harder than catching monsters of the same level. It was due to the cleverness of the human NPCs and because they were armed with profession skills and equipment. They didn’t give any extra EXP despite that, so there was no reason to hunt a thief gang with such difficulty. There were plenty of bountied criminals besides the thief gangs anyway.

But Ark shook his head. ‘My ability to adapt to circumstances will grow the more I fight tricky opponents. Like how I hadn’t even thought of returning an arrow with Riposte a while back, and since I also don’t know when I’ll have to fight a human NPC next, I have to gain experience with this opportunity.’

“Now, shall I see what you’ve got?”

Ark swept up all the items that were lying around in the campsite of the Grey Axe Gang. After shaking down two thief gangs like that, Snake’s belly filled all the way up. He wouldn’t make much even if he sold it all, but the fun of packing away the abundant japtrem that poured from the thief gangs was quite pleasurable.

Of course, it was tough to expect much of a quest reward or a jackpot item, but for steadily making money, he felt that the profit was better than going through a hunting ground.

Ah! He almost forgot to mention it, but right when the rascals who had bullied Ark when he was in elementary school rose to 4th grade, they were beaten up by Ark. Ark had been learning Taekwondo for 2 years. His personality of repaying his suffering many times over hadn’t changed at all from back then.

* * *

“Oh, did you take care of these guys? I haven’t seen you before, so you must be a newcomer? Good work, I’ll remember your face from now on since you took care of two of them. Ah, this is the promised bounty. I ask that you work for Giran’s peace in the future as well.”

-You took down a bountied criminal and received a reward.

For completing the task successfully, your Giran contribution has increased by 15.

You have completed your first bounty hunt and your Hunter Rank has been elevated to E.

When he turned in the evidence to the Giran Guard, he received 25 Gold and his contribution and Hunter Rank went up as an additional reward. He thought there wasn't much meaning besides the bounty, but it did feel good to have something rise. Also, he caught wanted criminals and received a bounty. This simple work was surprisingly quite fun.

"I didn't get information about the quest, but... well, it doesn't matter. I'll get it eventually. Let's just sweep through the thief gangs and get experience for a while. It's unexpectedly fun and seems profitable, too."

Ark pulled off two more wanted sheets from the message board.

Act 3 : Meeting Sid Again

Giran's main street was as noisy as ever. Even at dawn, the Trade district in particular was so crowded that there was no space to walk due to the players selling and buying goods. With the exception of a space where three or four people could barely slip out, the street was covered with stalls. It looked exactly like a European flea market that you could see on TV. There were all kinds of items, from material items worth several Coppers to Rare items; there was nothing they didn't have.

If you used the auction house, you had to pay a fee of 5%. As the price of the item grew higher, the fee became very burdensome. From the buyer's perspective as well, there were a lot of players who preferred direct dealing since they could get the item they needed right away. However, there was the risk of getting scammed in a direct deal if you didn't know the market price, so you had to be careful.

'Well, though that doesn't matter to me...'

Ark hadn't been interested in business like that from the very beginning. He could get the items he needed on his own, and it was Ark's opinion that it was more profitable to just use the time to hunt rather than do business to save on the fee.

Ark went through the flea market without much thought. He intended to quickly sell off the japtem he had gathered from the thief gangs in the store and go bounty hunt. But at the end of the flea market, he suddenly stopped.

In Ark's gaze, shoddy clothes were piled up in a secluded corner.

– We are having a clothing sale for all items. Flat price of 50 Coppers!

In New World, casual clothes existed in addition to armor. They didn't have any defense, but they were worn in villages or cities to look cool. Also, there were cases where expensive clothes had an option called 'Charm.' Charm was a stat that influenced intimacy when talking to an NPC. That's why Merchants went around with several articles of such high-class clothes. Naturally, fancy clothes like that were as expensive as armor.

The clothes piled up on the stall right now were just casual clothes. They could only be used for something like trying them on once for a change of mood. Of course, since Ark had no interest in clothes in reality either, there was no reason for him to be interested in game clothes.

What interested Ark wasn't the clothes, but the Hobbit Merchant squatting behind them. The player who was so absorbed in needlework that it was as if he couldn't feel Ark's gaze on him was Sid.

'Why is Sid selling clothes here?' Ark tilted his head.

Sid had changed his profession to Trader. It was a profession where one would buy and sell trade goods from distant villages or cities. But he was making and selling clothes worth just 50 Coppers? Moreover, the feeling that emanated from Sid wasn't bright and cheerful, like before. As if the backdrop around him had changed to grayscale, he gave off a heavy feeling of gloominess.

"Hey..."

As if afraid of Ark's shadow, Sid flinched as he quickly bowed his head. "Ah! Welcome. I am selling all kinds of apparel at a special discounted price. Use high quality goods to get off on the right start every day. We even have the feathered hat and small fashion items that are popular these days. Please buy one. It's only 50 Coppers. If you buy two, I'll cut 10 Coppers for you."

"Sid, why are you doing business in a place like this?"

Spreading out his goods one by one, Sid's hands abruptly stopped. Then he slowly raised his head and stared at Ark for a moment with a dumb expression.

“A-Ark—!”

Tears suddenly dripped from Sid’s acorn-shaped eyes. Not knowing the reason for this outburst, Ark asked with a shocked voice, “Ehh? What’s the matter?”

“Waaahh, Ark. I wanted to see you.”

“Why in the world are you crying? What happened?”

“I... the truth is, I was ruined.”

“Ru-ruined?”

“I mean, I even got a loan from the Merchant Guild and bought goods, but... sniffle, I struggled to death and returned, but the market price had dropped all the way to the bottom, and... sob sob, I was put into debt by that... it’s hard to even repay my interest, so... waah, I started to do business to make a living somehow, but... my items don’t even sell ‘cause my Tailoring skill is low, and... I can’t even pay my interest so my debt is just growing, and.. WAAHH, I’m tired of making items that don’t even sell now.”

It seemed quite a lot had happened.

After explaining with snot and tears dripping, Sid ended up weeping with abandon. He cried so noisily that his wails rang throughout the flea market, making players glance over. Getting glared at unnecessarily as a result, Ark consoled Sid for now. After barely managing to cease his cries like that, Sid rubbed his eyes as he explained with a much calmer voice.

“You know how I was trying to raise the prices of Giran’s silk shares, right?”

“Yes, I heard.”

“When I parted with you, I had quite a lot of capital. So I went trading with the thought of raising my shares a lot with that. And after reaching the south-eastern region, I found out through the Merchant Guild that Giran’s silk prices had been booming for a long time. I thought it was an opportunity!”

Sid clenched his tiny fist tightly, as if reviving his excitement at that time.

No matter how irregular a trade good’s market price was, something that had been booming almost never plummeted overnight. Since it had just started to rise, there was a high chance that he would definitely make a net profit despite the time it

would take to return all the way to Giran. Having judged it as such, Sid decided to try engaging in a contest with his fate as a Merchant hanging on it.

“The top Merchant Guild Midus gives loans to Merchants as well. So went to a nearby guild and received a loan of 300 Gold, and wrote a contract that I would repay it after selling the silk in Giran. Then I even hired an expensive mercenary NPC to hurry and return to Giran, but...”

“The price of the silk fell.”

“...Yes.” Sid’s eyes welled up with tears again as he nodded. “I was tricked.”

“Tricked?”

“There were actually a few Merchants who competed with me for the silk shares. I found out later, but one of those Merchants used his guild’s funds to control the price.”

“Control the price? How?”

“He offered a price higher than the trading post to the Merchants who came with silk from the southeastern region and bought it all. Since silk wasn’t coming into the trading post, of course the price could only skyrocket. Then, when I arrived with the silk, he sold off all the silk he’d gathered at the trading post.”

The silk scraped up from players had been sold in an instant. The result was obvious— the dramatic price drop of the suddenly abundant silk!

When Sid arrived at Giran, the price wasn’t even 50% of his purchase price.

In a case like this, the Merchant could only sell his goods to another region. But Sid had written a contract upon borrowing the money to sell in Giran. While he was unable to do anything, the contract time ended, all his silk was seized by the Merchant Guild, and he even racked up a debt of 200 Gold.

... Simply put, he had become bankrupt. As a result, Sid’s Reliability stat and Fame dropped to the bottom for violating the contract. In addition, his level and the proficiency of all his skills decreased for making a negative trade; since he had a debt on top of that, he had no money to buy goods and had completely become a beggar.

“Kekeke, I knew that would happen. For a Merchant, he looks stupid.” Dedric grinned as he rubbed salt in the wound.

But seemingly lacking the energy to even reply, Sid just sighed as he pointed to the clothes. "Now I'm just barely working on repaying my debt by selling clothes with the Tailoring skill I learned before, but..."

There was no knowing how many years it would take to repay 200 Gold by selling clothes worth 50 Coppers. In addition, his Tailoring skill was low so he could only make clothes without any options; there was no reason for them to even sell well.

After explaining that much, Sid glanced at Ark. "Ark-nim, by any chance..."

"I don't have money." Ark quickly cut him off.

There was actually quite a fortune in his bag. He had almost 700 Gold when he left Giran. He had made 100 Gold from selling the japtem he had gathered from the event quest and the bounty he'd gotten just now, so he had 800 Gold in all. But who was Ark? Ark's bag was a gaping black hole. Money that had gone in once would never be thrown back out again.

As if he had remembered Ark's intense personality, Sid's shoulders slumped. "I see... Haahh..."

"I'm sorry. I had a lot of expenses here and there."

"No, it's fine. It was my mistake anyways. Hahaha, I can only work hard on my needlework and repay my debt. Well, hahaha. Pay no attention to me."

The despairing Sid laughed bitterly to himself. Seeing Sid being broken like this made him feel very uncomfortable. Sid was one of the few people he had met in the game, a player he liked. Ark had earned quite a lot of useful information through Sid as well, and he had gotten lots of help from him in the blind auctions too. But to turn a blind eye on Sid as he requested help...

'I'm just like my relatives.'

After his father passed away and his mother was hospitalized, his relatives had changed face overnight. Ark had felt hatred towards them and had vowed to never live like them. Although this was, of course, a game, looking away from Sid, who he thought of as a friend, made him feel just like them. That bothered him more than anything.

'Still, I can't just lend him money when he's sitting atop a pile of debt... isn't there a way I can help Sid without incurring a loss? Without costing money...'

After pacing around for a bit, Ark was soon able to find a way easily enough.

Ark was a combat-style character, Sid was a Merchant. Then wasn't the answer unexpectedly simple?

'Right, there was a method like that!'

"Sid, would you like to hunt with me?"

"Hunt?"

"Yes, I'm of a mind to go around Giran while focusing on bounty hunting for a while."

"But you know that I'm no help in hunting."

"You don't have to hunt."

Ark grinned as he explained. Ark had to go around a large region in order to hunt the thief gangs. Naturally, he would end up hunting trivial monsters and not just the thief gangs. And he even had to collect ingredients, but he couldn't entrust items to Snake if he wanted to use the Deadly Poison skill. As a result, he was always short on bag space. If he had to return to Giran every time his bag filled up, the time wasted wasn't insignificant.

However, if Sid joined in, all the problems would be resolved in a single go. He had the 6 bags of Merchants, so there wasn't a problem with storage, and if Sid returned to Giran instead of Ark, he could even concentrate the movement time on hunting.

"So you're asking me to be your sales agent?"

"Yes, you won't need to shuttle back very often because you have a lot of bag space. Also, when your bag fills up, it shouldn't be dangerous to get to Giran if I escort you to a safe road."

"Then the distribution...?"

"I'm also tight on cash, so it's hard for me to give you a separate compensation. In exchange, you can have the profit that you make with your Merchant skill outside of the original prices of the items. At the very least, it'll be better than selling clothes here. You'll also be able to raise your dropped Reliability, EXP, and skill proficiency."

To be honest, Ark hadn't been the one who had thought of this method. If you went up to Giran's store, Merchants who had failed in business like Sid were gathered. They were people who dreamt of comebacks as they sold japtem gathered by players and prepared capital with the commissions. Of course Sid was aware of this too, but

those people were mostly Merchants who could net a profit of at least 20%. But having chosen Trader, Sid could get a 10% profit by selling normal japtem, so no players would leave their japtem to him.

"I'll, I'll do it! No, please let me do it!"

Sid grabbed Ark's hands. He had already experienced how fiercely Ark scraped up japtem before. If he could take a monopoly on those items, then even if he only netted a 10% additional profit when selling them off, it wouldn't be a small sum. If Ark was lucky enough and he occasionally picked up a few expensive items, Sid would be able to make that much more money. It was at least better than sitting here selling clothing for 50 Coppers.

'Huhuhu, this might be an unexpectedly good idea...'

Ark made a satisfied smile. If Sid joined in, he would get 6 bags for free. Moreover, since Sid would automatically return to the village and exchange the goods for money when the items accumulated, he was no different from a walking shop!

Sid was just a bag to Ark after all.

"Alright. Then let's take care of the items I've got right now first and leave."

"Yes!"

Sid hurried to clean up his stand. Then, while Sid was heading to the store, Ark went back to the message board, tore off all the thief gang wanted posters, and registered them. Now that he had no reason to stop by again, he planned to live in the hunting ground altogether.

"I got 15 Gold for it all, and a 2 Gold profit." Having met Sid again in the square, the color had returned to his face.

"Nice. Then you can buy a contract with that money, right?"

"Huh?"

"You have to write up the Merchant contract. Didn't you say that cost about 1 Gold?" said Ark with a suave smile.

In the end, Sid had to hold back his tears, spend 1 Gold, and write up a sales agent contract.

In any case, that's how Ark came to meet the credit delinquent Hobbit Merchant Sid again.

* * *

In a dark cave that stirred with dismal energy, two men were walking along the cave. One was a handsome man with blond hair wearing sparkling white armor. It was the highly renowned Holy Knight Alan. The man wearing normal plate armor and looking relatively more lacking was Andel.

Andel looked all around as he asked, "I don't sense any presence at all? Is this really the secret hideout of the ones called the Dark Brother?"

"Don't make me say it multiple times," replied Alan as he lit his way with a shining sword.

In New World, there was still a lot of information that wasn't known to ordinary players yet. One of them was how to use a tavern. There was always a tavern in city-sized villages, and if you paid a certain amount of money to the tavern owner, he would tell you a rumor drifting around in New World. It might be a rumor about what kind of item was where, and there was also quest info. Of course, it was still a rumor so there were cases where you could struggle to find it, but get nothing. But in New World, where the player had to find every clue on his own, even that had considerable merit.

"But there is a separate NPC who gives the really rare information. It's the tavern's Minstrel. If you listen to a certain number of the Minstrel's songs, he will even tell you rare information. Well, he only gives you real info if you pay at least 10 Gold for listening to one song, but the Minstrel's info is at least 80% reliable. We got the clue about the Labyrinth of Tarsha from a Minstrel last time, too."

That really meant the Minstrel was an NPC you could only use by using money like water. Like that, Alan acquired high-quality information with a method Ark wouldn't have even dared to try.

"It took a whole 100 Gold to get the info about the Dark Brother. This is definitely it."

"Then that's a relief, but..."

"Wait, there's something there."

Just then, something got picked up by the 'Life Detection' aura that Alan had cast. When he stopped walking and raised his shining sword, a red crest that looked like a blood-red fingerprint appeared on the cave wall. One old man was standing in front of the crest like a stone statue, staring at the two. It was an elderly man who emitted a somehow strange feeling, but a faint smile spread on Alan's lips.

"Seems like we found it properly." Alan approached by one step as he asked, "Is this the secret meeting place of the Dark Brother?"

"From whom did you hear about this place?"

"I heard it from the capital's Minstrel."

"It appears that he has become lax in keeping secrets, for him to have slipped the info to those who do not even smell of blood." The smell of blood the NPC mentioned was referring to the Chaotic alignment. The elder's eyes narrowed. "And for you to be Holy Knight Alan..."

"You know of me?"

"Huhuhu, just where do you think this is?"

"I don't want to reveal my identity."

"I suppose you would," the elder smiled faintly as he nodded, "since nothing good will come of a rumor that the highly reputed Holy Knight Sir Alan was getting involved with people like us. However, there's no need to worry. We ensure customer privacy; that's our iron-clad rule. In any case, seeing as you're talking like that, it seems you're not idiots who rushed over to subjugate us or something... Alright, shall we hear about your business now, Holy Knight Sir Alan?"

"I heard that you handle all kinds of jobs here."

"Of course. You could call illegal works in particular our specialty."

"There's someone, no, a foreigner... that I want dead."

"An assassination request? I thought you were someone with quite an overflowing sense of justice, how surprising."

"You're saying more than expected."

"Are you offended? Well, alright. The bottom line is that of course it's possible. But... making contact with us shouldn't have been an easy decision for someone like you. For you to come all the way here and ask for an assassination... it seems you have a resentful relationship that you can't reveal?"

"Do I have to say that much?"

When Alan showed a nasty look, the elder laughed bleakly. “No, there’s no need. I get it, we always welcome requests. But of course you know that we aren’t volunteer workers, yes?”

“State your desired compensation.”

“The price differs depending on the term of the request. You probably know since you’re also a foreigner, but all foreigners have a mystical ability, so it’s impossible even for us to murder them completely. It is, however, possible for us to deal as much damage as you desire. Naturally, how much damage we deal differs depending on the compensation.”

At the end of the elder’s words, they heard the sound of bleak laughter as a message window popped up.

You have succeeded in having a secret meeting with the secret assassin organization only heard of in rumors, the ‘Dark Brother.’

The Dark Brother is an underground organization that keeps countless secrets. They have covertly taken part in the history of New World, and at times they are dangerous people who achieve their objective by any means necessary. However, there are only very few people who know of their identity.

A player who succeeds in having a secret meeting with the Dark Brother can request a special job that cannot be resolved alone.

However, bear in mind that dealing with these shady people can cause a fatal impact on your alignment and Fame. In addition, if the truth of your dealings with them is found out, you could even become enemies of the Church.

For every request made to the Dark Brother, ‘Good’ alignment will drop by 50 and Fame will decrease by 500. In the case of an alignment of 0, it will become -50 and you will become Chaotic.

‘Dark Brother’ Assassination Request Manual

A-rank request: Murders the target at least 5 times. Takes at least 3 equipment items. 200 Gold commission.

B-rank request: Murders the target at least 3 times. Takes at least 2 equipment items. 150 Gold commission.

C-rank request: Murders the target at least 1 time. Takes at least 1 equipment item.

100 Gold commission.

"I choose the A-rank request." After reading through the message, Alan replied without hesitation.

At that, the elder's eyes gleamed faintly. "Oho, there aren't that many people who request the A-rank... looks like you've built up quite a lot of feeling with the opponent. Alright, we accept. The person we have to get rid of is?"

"Can I believe in your ability to kill?"

In response, the elder grinned as he flicked his finger. At the same time, torches lit up here and there in the cave. As they looked around, that was when Alan and Andel's faces stiffened. Before they knew it, three men wearing black masks were pointing swords at their backs.

"A-Alan!" Andel murmured with a slightly scared expression.

But Alan smiled faintly instead as he nodded. "Good, you're worth trusting."

Ever since he entered the cave, Alan had left his Life Detection aura turned on. But he hadn't sensed any signs of them, meaning that the level of their 'Stealth' was high enough to not be perceived by the aura.

"I'll ask again, the target is?"

"...Ark!"

At Alan's reply, the elder's eyes twitched slightly. "Ark, you say... Jackson's hero? He's not an easy opponent indeed."

"You know him?"

"This is the Dark Brother. Information of that level is basic."

"Good, you're becoming more trustworthy."

"Wait." Just then, Andel ground his teeth as he took a step forward. "I want to accompany the kill team. I must see that bastard die with my own eyes."

"There's nothing bad for us if someone who knows the objective's face accompanies us. But it shouldn't be good if your relationship with us becomes known?"

"That doesn't matter!"

“Alright. We are prepared to take in the customer’s demands at all times. If you tell us where you’re staying, we’ll compose the kill team and send them to you tomorrow night. Are there any other matters?”

“No.”

Alan paid the 200 Gold and backed out of the cave. After walking for a while without talking, Alan asked as if in passing, “Will you be okay? If you’re to follow the kill team around, you’ll have to give up on leveling up for a while. Your stats dropped again from dying at Jackson. You haven’t recovered them yet, right?”

“Something like that doesn’t matter anymore.” Andel’s eyes gleamed as he muttered. “I only did the Global Exos entrance exam for fun anyways. I have no interest in it anymore. My only goal is Ark, that bastard. Lariette said that bastard was an applicant too, right? Che, a fucking beggar with his life hanging on entrance into Global Exos... but it was a mistake to mess with me. No matter what method I have to use, I’ll make it so that he won’t pass the entrance exam. No, I’ll make it so he won’t even be able to dare to play the game anymore!”

Alan nodded heavily.

Andel was the eldest child of a considerably wealthy family. He was getting allowance from his parents and using that right now, but in time he’d be able to get at least one decent shopping mall. He was only taking the Global Exos exam because he was trying to pretend that he couldn’t overcome his parents’ pestering. He didn’t have something like an earnest reason, like Ark did.

“Anyways, thanks, Alan. I didn’t think you’d go this far for me.”

“How bad must it be for you to ask even me?”

“Your alignment and Fame must’ve been cut down too... I won’t forget this favor.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Alan replied with mock graciousness.

The NPCs Alan had sought out were the assassin organization, Dark Brother. When the person you had a grudge with wasn’t Chaotic, this was the only way to kill them without becoming Chaotic yourself. But perhaps for the game balance, there were considerable limitations that came with using an assassin guild.

First of all, it wasn’t easy to meet the assassin guild in secret because it was an underground organization. Also, the minimum commission fee was 100 Gold, a sum that reached \$1,000 in cash. That wasn’t all— if you made an assassination request; even your alignment and Fame were cut. Alan had a different perspective from

Andel, whose Fame had already reached the bottom because he had a history of being Chaotic. For a Holy Knight, to whom Fame was as important as level, it was truly an extreme measure.

‘Andel, I didn’t do it for you.’ Alan lightly clenched his teeth.

This was something that had happened a while ago. Occupying 1st place in contribution, Alan had proudly returned to the Warrior Guild. And there, he heard the name of Ark again.

“Have you heard of the name Ark before?” asked the Warrior Guild branch leader.

“I have.”

“Actually, there’s intel that you tied for 1st place with him.”

“What? Are you serious?”

“Moreover, he’s neither a Magician nor a Merchant. If you know each other, could you contact him and ask him for the exact details? If you could have him join a subordinate guild of the Warrior Guild, even better.”

Alan’s face contorted at the branch leader’s words.

‘... That bastard damaged my pride.’

Until now, the existence called Ark had been no different from a fly to Alan. He was annoying, but he was someone Alan hadn’t cared enough about to get up and catch.

Alan was often called a modern noble, and he himself knew that very well. Whether it was sports or grades, he had always insisted on being the best. Everything he wanted came into his hands. That was the same in the game as well. Alan had to be the best in every field that he was interested in. But a meddler he hadn’t even considered interfered. And around that time, Alan witnessed a video of Valderas and one player that had been uploaded on the Internet.

The player who was fighting Valderas was... Ark.

‘He’s a hindrance.’ Displeasure crept up in Alan’s chest. ‘It’s a matter of fact that I’ll pass the entrance exam. What’s important isn’t passing or failing. It’s about whether I can be the top or not.’

The main character of the video hadn’t been revealed on the Internet yet, but Global Exos was probably already paying attention to Ark. They must have received his report, and if you really compared them...

The impact Ark had made was far bigger than the one Alan had made.

That meant that Alan was falling behind Ark in their assessment. That was something Alan couldn't tolerate.

'Alan is my other self. His defeat is my defeat. And...'

He also didn't like how Lariette chattered about Ark whenever she had the opportunity. Alan pretended like he had met her by chance in the game, but Lariette was a girl that Alan had picked out since the day of the interview. That's why he used the game as a pretext to draw her in, and he was slowly winning her over. After all, there was no girl who wouldn't come his way if he put his mind to it. But he absolutely couldn't condone the fact that Lariette was showing interest in a man other than himself. That was what made Alan start to dislike Ark. It was absurd, but considering such an absurd thing so earnestly was the mentality of guys with lots of money.

And now, Ark had touched his pride. It was just a game, but he couldn't fall behind anyone all the more *because* it was a game. He also had to top Global Exos' entrance exam, of course. He could never tolerate someone who got in his way.

'If there's someone blocking my way, I'll destroy him with all my power, no matter who he is!'

That was the way Alan had always lived, and how he would continue to live.

Alan stopped walking and looked back at Andel. "I also dislike the guy that you dislike. That's all."

"Alan, thanks. After we've smashed the bastard, I'll devote all my power to helping you," responded Andel with a deeply moved expression.

But Alan's eyes were infinitely cold as he looked at Andel's face. 'The reason why I like you is because of that servility.'

Thus, the Anti-Ark Alliance was made.

Act 4 : Meeting the Girl

"Chiiik, I-I'm angry...!"

The brawny, muscular Orc collapsed as it trembled. At the same time, the chain mail the Orc had been wearing dropped. It was a pretty awesome-looking armor, but it wasn't an item he could use— it was the proof that he got after defeating the Orc Thief Gang.

"Phew, the thief gang this time took quite a lot of time."

Ark opened his stats window as he collected the proof.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +150		
Fame	1,335	Level	85
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson's Hero		
Health	1,695	Mana	1,295 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	212 (+5)
Agility	252 (+17)	Stamina	322
Wisdom	31	Intelligence	250
Luck	42	Flexibility	21
Art of Communication	23	Affection	40 (+10)
Special Stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			53
Equipment Effects			
Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility 2, Frost Resistance +20			
Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10%			
Crystal Golem's Head: Mana +100			
Norad Boots: Movement Speed +10%, Evasion +5%			
Adelaine's Necklace: Defense +40, Affection +10			
Resurrecting Spirit: Strength +5, Mana Recovery +5%			
* All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark.			
* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (15 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat).			
* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.			
* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.			

"The level up speed is more or less okay..."

It had already been 2 weeks since he started bounty hunting. Since he spent five days training the Familiars when he first started, he had only invested 9 days into hunting. He had level up from 78 to 85, a total of 7 levels.

He had raised his level 10 times in just three days thanks to the event quest, but that was a special circumstance. It was impossible to level up even once a day with normal hunting, and for a level 80 character, it was hard to level up once in 2 days. It was because the monsters that showed up were much stronger, so it would take longer to fight and recover. One also had to return to the village after a certain amount of hunting. There was equipment repair, food procurement, and clearing the bag filled with japtem to take care of. And depending on one's profession, an Archer needed to restock their arrows, and a Magician had to get the reagents used in magic.

Town – Hunting Ground – Town – Hunting Ground. This was the basic formula in all games. As a result, the time lost moving and reorganizing in the village was considerable. The higher the level you were and the the hunting ground was from town, the more of an obstacle it became to leveling up.

However, this formula didn't apply to Ark. That was because after becoming a scrub, Sid was dragged in as his exclusive merchant.

Sid acted faithfully, as per the contract. He kept all the items Ark had scraped up, like a warehouse, then he took them to Giran when his bags were completely full to exchange them for items necessary for hunting or Gold. In exchange, Sid got 10% of the sale sum, but since it wasn't money that came out of Ark's pocket, it wasn't a loss for him.

The terms were close to slavery, but Sid had no choice.

Anyway thanks to that Ark was able to hunt for 9 days and during that time he fought an average of 2 bandit groups a day.

In 9 days he wiped out 18 bandit groups. Then, it got to the point where word about Ark spread around the bandits, and they avoided him.

'Tsk, if the Orc bandits didn't run away, too, it would've been done an hour ago...'

Once the bandits run it gets really hard to find them again.

But in it's own way there were benefits.

The bandits would run away and then lay an ambush for Ark, who had to fight them back using all of his skills. Due to this, many of his skills rose very quickly in proficiency.

Passive Skill

Sword-Hand Combat (Intermediate: 252/300) Sword mastery and hand to hand combat have been refined to increase overall attack power.

Survival Cooking (Advanced: 332/500) Unknown dishes can be created from ingredients obtained in nature.

Indomitable Will (Intermediate: 134/300) Attack power, recovery capabilities and critical rate increase near death.

Indomitable Body (Intermediate: 127/300) Defense, critical evasion, and recovery capability increase near death.

Foraging (Intermediate: 255/300) Ingredients can be gathered from nature.

Ingredient Identification (Intermediate: 264/300) Ingredient effects can be identified.

Horse Riding (Beginner: 3/100) The higher the level, the more skillfully horses can be handled.

Adrenaline (Beginner: 27/100) Reaction rate increases and fear state is released near death.

Counter Attack (Beginner: 88/100) Counterattack enemy attack with a critical strike.

Parry (Beginner 58/100) Block half of the weapon damage from enemy attack.

Active Skills

Nursing (Intermediate:234/300 Gives patients hope energy and courage. Mana cost:10

Spirit of the Cat (Advanced: 374/500) Mice and small monsters tremble in fear and receive a decrease in their attack, movement speed, and defence. Mana Cost: 120

Eyes of the Cat (intermediate: (203/300) Use sharp eyes to identify enemies. Mana cost:50

Magic Restoration (Intermediate: 239/300) restore an item to it's original form. Mana Cost:10

Profession Skills

Dark Blade (Intermediate: 120/300) Assimilate attack with darkness and strike the enemy. Mana Cost: 100

Blade Storm (Beginner: 10/100) Sword shards create a vortex and tear apart the enemy. Mana Cost: 400

Summon Demon (Intermediate: 125/300) Summon up to three kinds of demon familiars. Spirit Power Cost: 100

Now, all of the skills he learned in the beginning had reached intermediate level.

The job skills, Dark Blade and Summon Demon, had even greater effects when they reached Intermediate Level.

Dark Blade critical hit damage went up from 150% to 180%, Summon Demon was reduced from 1 mana every second to 1 mana per 2 seconds. Additionally, there was the Resurrecting Magic Ring which increased mana regen.

Because of this, he could use his skills as he pleased even when he had his familiars out. And his Sword-Hand Combat which he used the most, but had the slowest growth rate, reached advanced level.

Ark wasn't the only one to improve. Learning new strategies gave him a new excuse to feed the summons food. Therefore the summons now reached level 40.

'Not bad!'

After Ark had verified the information he wore a satisfied smile.

Actually, he had still not gotten the clue or information for the quest, which was the reason he was hunting robbers. However, it wasn't that big of a deal. As long as he kept hunting robbers he would eventually acquire the clue.

Ark peacefully thought about it. Even if he worried about it, the clue would not come any faster. The most important thing right now is to level up and raise his skills. And he was having fun hunting bounties one by one.

"Well, first let's reorganize and continue hunting, shall we?"

"Oh, are you done now?"

When he walked out of the forest, Sid welcomed him.

After Ark passed him the items he got from the thief group and sat in front of the campfire, a message appeared.

– You have arrived at a campground.

50% faster health and mana regeneration. 50% decrease in the possibility of a monster attack.

This was a skill from Sid's job, a skill from being a trader called the 'campsite' effect.

Once the thief group was spotted, there was nothing for Sid to do. Therefore, Sid would find a safe place and make a camp while waiting for Ark. But Sid wasn't just playing around.

"You didn't find the information you needed this time either?"

Sid asked without stopping his work.

Sid was salvaging items one by one with his merchant skill called 'Item Decomposition' while waiting for Ark.

He tanned the hide and then cut the leather. As for the equipment items, he cut the connecting parts and sorted them according to their type of material.

Although this takes a lot of time, when battle breaks out, Sid had nothing to do. Also, he would get more money this way than if he just sold them as is.

'Yeah, still... this is taking longer than I thought it would'

"Don't worry about it."

"Actually Sid how much debt have you paid so far?"

"I've paid 50 gold."

"You've paid a lot so far."

"Yes, my Japtem Selling Skill increased, so I'm now making a 15% profit. And when I have time, I made clothes, so my tailoring skill also rose. Maybe because of that, whenever I go to Giran the clothes I make sell."

...Well, at least he hadn't created a incur a bigger debt.

The hobbit merchant, Sid, was travelling the continent to trade not long ago. But now, he was sewing until his hands blistered, and dismantling items just to earn a few more coppers and silvers. It was a scene you couldn't watch without tears.

However, Sid was quite a positive-minded user.

"It was hard to even pay the interest, but I am now also able to repay the debt, I can see the hope. It's all thanks to Ark-nim."

Sid, who was sitting on a tree trunk, was swinging and stamping on it with a satisfied expression.

'Well, it's all good if you are satisfied...'

"But where are we heading to next?"

"There's a group of Kobold Rogues nearby. We should go there first."

"I hope there's a lot of material to make useful dyes."

"There will be, since it's a higher leveled forest compared to here."

"Wow! That means we can create better clothes." After saying this, Sid went back to sewing and started humming to himself.

"Now that our Health has been filled, let's start moving."

"Okay, right after I dismantle this last item."

Dedric glanced at Sid with eyes filled with pity. Even before, the two weren't on good terms. Dedric, who says detestable things to anybody except Ark, would call Sid a beggar midget. So whenever they had time, they were arguing each other. But even so, Dedric couldn't help but pity Sid in this state.

"Really, I can't see past my tears."

It was then, while Dedric was shaking his head left and right., heavy footsteps suddenly approached and the nearby bushes shook.

"Dedric!" Ark shouted as he stood and jumped up.

Dedric quickly flew up into the air and looked around.

"It's from 3 o'clock. Master, two Trolls!"

Ark, who checked the direction, went through the forest with Skull. The two Trolls showed up about 10 meters away. However, they weren't approaching the campsite.

"Grrrrr, human... it's humans... Let's eat them!"

The person the Trolls were chasing while showing their teeth was a bobbed haired girl. A shoe was missing on one of her foot, and her clothes were torn here and there, as though she had been wandering the forest. The girl was full of wound, ran between the trees quickly.

'She seems like a NPC, but... why in this forest?'

Boom!

Then, the club swung by the Troll hit a tree.

The girl, who was trying to hide behind a tree, fell due to the surprise. She was shaking like a leaf while holding her ankle she seemed to have sprained because of the surprise. As though her figure looked appetizing, the Troll raised its club while licking its lip.

"...!"

The girl covered her pale and terrified face with her two hands.

And at the moment, the club had been dropped...!

Booo-boooom!

With violent sounds, the Troll was pushed back a few steps

The girl lifted her head with a surprised expression.

A young man with a large back and black hair flowing in the wind was standing in front of her.

It was none other than the 'Warrior of Justice,' Ark!

Ark turned his head slightly and revealed a gentle smile.

"There's no need to worry anymore. Stay back. I'll be done with it right away, and I will be right back."

Ah-ah, what a splendid phrase it was!

If it was a user, he wouldn't have spared a glance, but Ark was always kind to NPCs. Of course that kind behavior was deliberate for the rewards that may come along afterwards.

"Come here, you Trolls harassing such a frail girl!"

Ark rushed toward the Trolls while saying such a cliched speech.

"Don't bother me... Grrr!"

The Troll was angry at Ark for raining on his parade, and swung his club. However, Dedric came down like a thunderbolt on the Troll's mug, and the Troll staggered and stepped back. Then, came the continuous critical strikes from Ark. Skull bit the staggering Troll's ankle, and it fell like an old tree.

Taking not even a moment to catch his breath, the double critical chance triggered.

"Take this, Dark Blade!"

"Kwaaaaack!" The Troll shrieked and disappeared.

After taking care of one, the rest was no problem.

Under the combine assault of Dedric, Skull, and Ark from the 3 directions, they fell in panic and started to run away in rush. But after getting hit on the head with Skull thrown by Ark, it fell down.

Ark went over to the girl after grabbing the loot dropped from the Troll.

"Are you okay?"

The girl nodded with eyes filled with uneasiness.

Then, Ark vacantly stared the girl.

Since he rescued her there should be some reward, like a quest, so he waited for her to speak. But she just stared blankly at Ark.

'What? There's nothing?'

At that moment, the girl stood shakily, then fell down wrinkling her forehead.

Ark sighed after staring the girl a while.

Apparently, there was nothing to gain from the beggar like girl. However, Ark didn't have such cold heart to leave an injured girl alone.

"Anyway, for now let's go to my camp, it's just close by."

When Ark offered his shoulder, the girl blushed while relying on him.

"Ark! Huh? Who is that girl...?"

"She was being chased by a Troll."

"Is that so?"

Sid, who was gazing at the girl while examining her, the girl suddenly flinched and stared back with an idiotic expression on her face. Although she was dirty, the girl was considerably pretty.

She looked like she was around 15 years old, yet Sid, who was a Hobbit, had to look up to her while bending his neck back completely because of how tall she was.

Ark had asked the girl to sit down and used the Nursing skill on her ankle. Nursing was not healing. Thus, it wasn't fully healed but the swelling had greatly decreased.

When the girl nodded as an expression of thanks, Sid uselessly made a surprised expression. Then after searching in his bag, he took out a pair of leather shoes off.

"Looks like you don't have shoes. This isn't much, but please put them. Hehehe, Ark-nim, I'll be taking this off from my pay so please don't worry."

"I don't care that much but..."

"Oh, by the way, are you hungry?"

When the girl touched her belly, the witty Sid quickly handed her something to eat. Ark started to open his mouth after taking a moment to look at Sid strangely.

"Why were you wandering around at such place like this? Shouldn't there be a village nearby?"

At that moment, the girl who stopped nibbling at her food and suddenly burst into tears.

Sid became perplexed, then shouted. "Ark-nim, she's surprised because you asked her as if you were interrogating her!"

“Ah? What have I...”

“Apologize to her right now!”

Ark was confused by Sid’s behavior which changed dramatically after the appearance of the girl. The girl wiped away her tears, and wrote something on the ground with a tree branch.

– Help me!

* * *

“So... some bandits kidnapped your father and you barely escaped?”

The girl nodded her head in response to Ark’s question.

The girl’s name was Sarah. If Sarah didn’t say anything to Ark when he rescued her, it was because she was mute. And once she found her a little of her composure back in the campsite, she explained her situation by writing on the ground with a tree branch.

Her father’s job was Cartographer, and he was making maps of various regions while travelling the continent. And when he heard there was an undiscovered ruin nearby Giran, he went there to investigate. However, a rogue group had already settled on that territory.

As a Cartographer, he had a lot of techniques to avoid monsters thanks to his job’s characteristic of often travelling to dangerous regions. However, he couldn’t get away from the rogues’ tracking. Eventually, her father got caught by the rogues after he hid her, and the girl was heading to Giran in order to find help.

“Wahhhh, so that’s what happened. And then there were the Trolls...” Sid nodded his head with tears in his eyes.

– I’m begging you, please help me. It’s been four days since he got caught.

“Of course we must help! Right, Ark-nim?” Sid suddenly turned his head and looked at Ark.

Ark asked after looking at Sarah for a moment. “Where is the location?”

Then, Sarah scribbled on the ground again.

‘The Brown Rock Zone... It’s on the borderline of Giran region.’

Ark immediately opened the information window and checked the information on registered wanted criminals.

‘As I thought, there’s no information about the rogue group in the Brown Rock Zone’

Ark took all the wanted lists that were in Giran’s billboard. But he still had no clue regarding his quest although he had already clear 70% of the area. And the left ones were not said to be found near the Brown Rock Zone. Then, there’s only one answer : there was a rogue group other than the ones registered as wanted.

‘Right, how did I not think of this earlier? What I’m looking for is a rogue group related to a quest. I didn’t even think if they would be wanted or not.’

Ark finally understood his thinking process was wrong. The wanted rogue group will disappear if a user cleaned it up. There will be another rogue group created, but the new rogue group will be different from the annihilated rogue group. Maybe the rogue group Ark have been cleaning up were probably new rogue groups.

But the Heartsoul Bead had been stolen over a year ago.

‘In the New World, I can’t get clues from NPC without causal relationship. It means the rogue group who stole the Heartsoul Bead existed for over a year. Yet, they weren’t registered as wanted is because they didn’t have had any activity from them.’

It was a simple story when he thought about it.

There’s no way a rogue group that could be cleaned up by a headhunter at any time would hold a clue regarding a quest. It means Ark was cleaning up unrelated rogue groups almost for two days.

‘Maybe this is an opportunity. A hidden rogue group... there’s a high possibility. And more, no matter the form, it’s clearly a quest since it’s an NPC’s request. If it’s a wandering traveler, I can hardly expect a big reward, but there’s no reason to refuse.’

It was when Ark was diligently running his brain.

Since Ark did not respond for a while, Sid said with an angry voice. “Ark-nim, there’s no way you’ll ignore it, right?”

“Kekeke, of course he’ll feign ignorance. Master doesn’t do any job that doesn’t bring money!”

“Wha-what?”

"So, why would someone whom *this Dedric* calls Master have to help that dirty looking girl?"

"Shut up, you heartless Bat!"

"A Bat? This one is called *Sir Dedric*, the noble of the Netherworld!"

"Noble, my ass. You're nothing but a bat..."

"You bastard, do you want to die once?"

"Huh, you think I'm scared of you?"

Dedric and Sid started to glare and growl at each other.

"Dedric, enough! Sid, you as well."

Ark shouted and then revealed a gentle smile towards Sarah. "Don't worry. I can't pretend to ignore it after listening to the circumstances."

"Eeh? M-master! Look, look! Why are you trying to help this girl who looks penniless..."

"Shut up!"

Sid quickly covered Dedric's mouth and looked Ark with an impressed expression. "Woooo, Ark-nim. I'm actually very touched. So Ark-nim does have feelings after all."

After thinking about, it was a strange phrase.

"So what have you been thinking of me so far?"

"...A heartless Scrooge" Sid mumbled in small voice while turning his head slightly.

Even if he was smiling and thanking him at the same time with a naive looking face, he was actually thinking of him that way inside? As he thought, there was no one he can trust in the world.

However, Sid quickly smiled and shook his head. "But now, not anymore"

"Thank you so much, it's touching me to tears"

"Come on, it's just a joke. Would I really think like that?"

As Sid was flattering him and smiling like a silly goose, Sarah burst into laughter. Sid's face reddened and coughed since he found her laugh quite cute.

"Ahem. If it had been decided, let's go quickly. We don't know how long Sarah's father will last. Sarah, if it's Ark, he can definitely rescue your father safe and sound."

– Really? Will you really help me?

Sarah look straight at Ark with big eyes as to confirm his decision.

"Yeah, if he's still alive, I'll definitely rescue him"

– Thank you. Thank you very much.

Sarah bowed with eyes brimming with tears.

Ding! At the same time, a sound rang and a quest window popped up.

Rescue Sarah's father!

You have saved a girl from a Troll in the dark woods. The girl has opened her heart to your warm attention and revealed her problem. Her father, who's been travelling with her together, got kidnapped by bandits.

You, who is full of sense of justice, can't ignore her pain and have promised to rescue her father. But be careful. There's not much time. It has been 4 days since he was captured.

The bandits won't be hospitable, it might be too late if you don't hurry. (The quest will be considered as a failure if you can't resolve it within 12 hours after receiving it.)

Difficulty: E +

"Huh? A quest!" Sid's eyes went round and he started muttering to himself.

'Shouldn't he already know she would be giving a quest?' Ark looked at him with a dumbfounded eyes.

Even Sid who was quite knowledgeable about the game didn't seem to know much about how quests turns up. Well, since one would usually receive quest for merchants in a Merchant Guild or in a trade point, he probably hadn't experience this kind of quest yet.

'Anyway, the difficulty was "E +". Since it was a party quest, it won't be easy. But I have done a few E + quests before. Since then I leveled up and skilled up a lot, it should be okay.'

"Sid, let's go"

"Yes!" Sid replied in high spirits and helped Sarah up.

The other party was an NPC. Ark could not understand why Sid was looking at her with expectations. In any case, Sid's eyes were glowing as he looked at Sarah.

* * *

"Heave ho!"

Boooom!

The golem which weighed hundreds of kilograms flew up, and then got stuck in the ground.

Like its heavy weight, the fall damage was tremendous. The golem lost 350 HP in one go, its body became all red and was on the brink of death. However the attack did not end there. The body slam came into as soon as the golem was tried to get up.

The golem got slammed against the ground once more. Its Health emptied and was destroyed.

"Hahaha come on, this is too easy."

The person who laughed broadly above the broken golem was the former hard boiled Inspector, JusticeMan.

JusticeMan, who was depressed after he had failed the event quest, found a new hunt ground thanks to Ark.

The day after Ark asked the young Lord of Jackson to look after JusticeMan, JusticeMan went to see the young Lord.

"I've heard of your brave act from Sir Cross and Ark quite well."

"I've only done what I've need to do." JusticeMan replied politely.

A much younger looking NPC, but age didn't bother much to JusticeMan who was familiar with the hierarchical society. Since he was a Lord of a territory he deserved

a certain amount of respect. And Ark also advised him to be well seen by the young Lord.

"I know how much you all put into helping Jackson. But the rules being what it is shames me that I cannot reward you with something fancy. So... although I can't reward you for saving Jackson, I can give you some amenities."

"Amenities...?"

"From now onwards, use the Blacksmith and canteen that belongs to me for equipment repairs and food supply. I have already informed them, so it'll be 50% cheaper than if you use the village's shop"

"Really?" JusticeMan asked him again with a bright expression.

JusticeMan who did not have any financial sense was struggling with the food and repair fees. But to be able to get them at 50% off!

But JusticeMan sighed with a troubled expression. JusticeMan already reached level 45, so it became harder to level up in Jackson Castle where there were only level 40 hunting grounds. To get such a bonus when he was thinking of moving elsewhere...

The young Lord nodded, smiled, and questioned, "I really don't get foreigners. Why do you all risk your lives in search of stronger monsters? Well, if that is your way of life, then there is nothing to be done. Even so, if it's just that kind of reason, there is no need for you to leave Jackson."

"Yes?"

"Truthfully, there are a few dangerous areas around Jackson restricted to Soldiers. The ruins Ark went to with my father in the past is also one of those areas. Of course, they are off limits to the general public, but if you'd like, I will give you special permission to enter it."

In New World, not only Jackson but Giran and other regions, too, had restricted areas. They were regions not open to the general public, either following a scenario or for various other reasons. And to enter one, one had to fulfil certain conditions. In Jackson for example, it seems the key to unlock that restriction was the event quest.

Therefore, the region permitted to JusticeMan by the young Lord was placed in the Shadow Forest, a region called Rotting Bog where monsters from levels 30 to 60 appeared.

“First, gain experience there. There’ll be time when you’ll need it...” The young Lord told him while making a subtle smile as though he was anxious.

In any case, thanks to that, JusticeMan could monopolize a hunting ground nobody went to.

Probably since it was a restricted area, the Rotting Bog was overflowing with monsters. But, was that all? The monster drops were also substantial. There was an equipment item dropped for every 3 monsters, and about twice a day a magic item would drop. And in addition, repair fees only cost half so gold quickly piled up in his bag.

JusticeMan looked the equipment items with a pleased glance.

Studded Knuckles			
Weapon Type	Knuckles		
Attack Damage	12~15	Durability	14/40
Weight	10	Usage Restriction	Level 45 or Higher
Knuckles once used by a famous Martial Art Fighter. On top of the tough leather, the iron studs was added to protect the hand while increasing the Fighter’s attack.			
Options: Hand to hand skills +20% Attack.			

Comfortable Trunks			
Armor Type	Underwear		
Defense	20	Durability	28/60
Weight	5	Usage Restriction	Level 50
Armor from the south where they like comfortable clothing. Boldly cut along the hem for ease of movement. However, to one not accustomed to trunks, one could appear very distasteful.			
Options: Reaction Speed +10% , Dignity -20.			

These were all items he got from the monsters in the bog. JusticeMan thoughtlessly put on various equipment such as the trunks, paired with a sleeveless t-shirt, and he ended up looking shabby, but that didn’t bother him. In any case, he didn’t look very different in real life as he did now.

“HuHuHu, To think I would be able to monopolize such a hunting ground. Do the people in the neighboring village even know about this place? I’m greatly benefitting from Ark!”

“Damn, what are you doing? If you have time to pose please come help us!”

Suddenly, from the side an angry voice called out.

Turning his head he saw a few users being chased by 2 golems.

They were the ones JusticeMan had dragged in to play the game; 1401 to 1410... users who used their parole numbers as their in game name.

At first, he came with around 30 players, but they all scattered leaving only Roco and the paroles’ group.

And working to death from level 45, JusticeMan already went up to level 55. However, their average level was only 35. They came when they were at level 20, so they leveled up at least 15 levels, but it was still impossible to fight against a level 60 golem.

“Cheer up, everybody. The earth is your friend, she will always protect you.”

As the rehabilitation group started to get beaten, Roco took out her harp and played ‘Song of Protection,’ raising their defence stat. But, then, gravels jumped from the ground and coiled around the paroles’ group.

“Oh, it’s our cute Roco!”

“We can only rely on you.”

“That Mr. Boxer-shorts has muscles inside his brains, and knows only to fight!”

The parole group crowded around Roco and cheered for her.

“Your words, I’ll remember it, number 1403!”

“Damn, that old man has also good ears.”

As soon as JusticeMan joined in, the situation reversed instantly.

The golem flew up in the air like a dead leaf after getting a monkey flip.

JusticeMan was only level 55, but he was no different than a level 68.

It was the effect of the stat "Justice."

The Justice stat was a rare class stat that would raise all of one's stat points as much as the stat level whenever he would join a battle of another person as a helper.

Currently, JusticeMan's Justice stat was at 13 and its effect was comparable to leveling up 13 levels. And even more, the user himself was a Martial Artist who had numerous real battle experiences. A level 60 monster wasn't even worth fighting.

JusticeMan shouted at number 1406 after quickly getting the golem near its death.

"Hold on for just a little bit! I'll be there in a sec to steal."

Number 1406 ran towards the golem and quickly moved his hands.

– You have stolen an 'Iron Ore' from the golem.

The parole group with people who had learned special techniques in real life, learned skills matching their specialities. Among them, the ex-pickpocket, 1406's skill 'Pickpocketing' was a skill that was able to steal an item from a near dead monster.

"Okay, now you can kill it."

While number 1406 grinned at the iron ore, the golem reverted back to gravel. The other golem also vanished after taking a concentrated assault. After taking care of the monsters while recovering their health, Roco said hesitantly.

"I-I think I should go. It's almost time for my part time job..."

"Eh? Already?"

"Ah, it's no fun when the only girl leaves..."

"Quit your part time job and let's just play the game. I'll pay for your allowance."

The parole group members mumbled with a regretful expression.

Roco can't afford to play much since she was busy with school and her part time job. Even so, she could raise her level to 30 was thanks to the parole group giving her a lot of experience whenever she's logged on.

"Hohoho, I'll log on at the same time tomorrow."

"It can't be helped. Then, let us head back to Jackson, since we have to repair our equipment, too."

So after having spent another rewarding day, JusticeMan and the parole group headed back to Jackson with heavy steps. When he was about to go to the young Lord's affiliated Blacksmith, Sir Cross suddenly approached him.

"Sir, you came back at the right time. The young Lord was looking for you."

"The young Lord? Did something happen?"

"I do not know the details either."

"Understood, I'll go at once. Hey, parole group, stay put and don't cause any trouble."

After warning the paroles, JusticeMan went to see the young Lord with Cross. The young Lord, who was rummaging in the paperwork for a long time, greeted them.

"Ah, JusticeMan. You came at the right time"

"Did something happen?"

"It's no big deal. Let's sit down first and talk."

The young Lord proposed for him to take a seat, and sat in front of him. He had the same subtle smile when he sent JusticeMan to the Rotting Bog.

"You, you haven't chosen a job yet, right?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"Hmm, Good. Do you remember me telling you to get a lot of experience?"

"Well. I think so..." JusticeMan didn't have very good memory.

The young Lord nodded as though it didn't matter and continued.

"There is something I thought of sometime ago. The Jackson territory had a lot of foreigners gathering due to its geographical condition. And you might know of it as well since you have experience. However, there are still a lot of unknown monsters around the area. It's hard to deal with foreigners who do not know much about the region's laws and the monsters around it."

"I fully comprehend the difficulties." Since he had been an Inspector.

"Therefore... I wish to found a Civil Organization able to move more actively than Soldiers to patrol and manage the territories. To put it simply, like a Militia. However, back then I couldn't find the right people, and that's when I was introduced to you by Ark. After observation, you are a man with overflowing with the sense of justice. So, I would like to entrust this task to you... How about it?"

"A-a militia? Are you talking about the Police?"

"Police? Is that how foreigners call the Militia?" The young Lord tilted his head at the strange word.

JusticeMan was not in the right mind to notice.

'Police...!'

Just hearing the word made his body tremble slightly. The countless overtimes and late nights. The fights with gangs, injuries, hospitalization... Looking back there was not one good memory.

However, JusticeMan only lived with a sense of justice, the profession of being an Inspector was the meaning of his life. So when he was forced into retirement with dishonor after the firing incident, it was as though the sky had come crumbling down. Was what we would call "the feeling of having become a somewhat useless failure of society?"

But...There is a person who needed him. And it was the young Lord who was in an official position that needed him for the public order. Although it was just a game, JusticeMan felt like he finally found a place where he belonged.

"I'll do it! Please let me do this!"

"Aah, calm down. It's not something perfectly settled yet."

"Yes?"

"Even if we're calling it Militia, it's still an organization where I delegate my authority and can have governmental authority. So of course, you need the qualification that goes with it, so it can be accepted by the citizens and the nobles."

"I-is that how it is? Then what should I do?" JusticeMan asked restlessly.

"You've already proven you can manage against monsters. The rest is to make a solid result that can be approved by anyone, and it just so happens that I have a good solution to prove your competence."

The young Lord passed over a leaflet. It was a promotional flyer for the Selibrid's arena in the capital of the Schudenberg Kingdom.

"There are always matches there. In addition, every time one wins, one gets points. And when one gets over a certain number of points, they can have their names on the news distributed every month. It doesn't matter either if it's in team or solo tournament. You just have to raise your points enough to get your name on the newspaper. Do you get it?"

In conclusion, anyone who gets their name published in the newspaper will be acknowledged.

'Arena... Police...!' JusticeMan looked at the flyer with blazing eyes.

This really was a rare opportunity. Judo was the meaning of JusticeMan's life, along with his job as an Inspector. However, the judo tournament became a dream within a dream when he received a leg injury. But in New World, it was more real than reality; Martial Arts tournaments existed. He could once again let his burning passion loose.

"Huhu... huhuhu."

Laughter leaked out of his clamped lips. The young Lord looked at him worriedly after seeing his weird reaction.

"H-hey, are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. No, I'm great. I'll leave as soon as I'm ready. No matter what monster stands in my way, I will get to Selibrid and return after raising up the Jackson region's prestige."

JusticeMan gripped the flyer and left the place.

"A Militia?"

The parole group asked him back with a dumb expression after JusticeMan had explained them. But it was only for a short moment. They started to show the same symptom as JusticeMan and started to grin.

"Does that mean... we are going to become policemen?"

"That's right. Police is the meaning of justice! I think it is a stage absolutely required for your society rehabilitating program. Is there anybody against it?"

At JusticeMan's question, they started to look at each other.

Branded as criminals, they would get cold regards anywhere they'd go. But they didn't committed crimes for their own pleasure. They committed crimes in order to eat and live but they always had, in a corner of their hearts, a wish to become a more prideful and helpful person. Because of that, they received the JusticeMan's Society Rehabilitation Training. But to skip over every courses and to be able to become a policeman... it was a dream one could not realize even if they were to die and reborn once more!

Although it was only a game, New World was a game so real that it could replace real life. NPCs were no different from real people in regards to how they speak and think. To be able to become a policeman such a world. There was no reason to hate it.

"No!" The parole group answered unanimously.

Then JusticeMan and the parole members prepared to depart right away. The day after, as soon as Roco logged on, they left and headed toward Selibrid, the capital of Schudenberg Kingdom.

"The goal is to top the individual and the team tournament!"

"OUUUU!"

Act 5 : Red Man

Kurururu!

There was a deafening honk.

Following Sarah, we reached the Brown rock area within 30 minutes.

Ark's party reached the bottom of a waterfall pouring down from distant heights. It was an area of darkened stone around Giran; with such excessive heights that Ark had never even been there. They took a break to view the stunning scenery but some of the view was blocked by the ruins.

While Ark was looking around, Sarah pointed to one side. At the back of the falls was a small space that one person might be able to pass through.

When just looking at it straight on, the mist from the water makes the passage impossible to see.

Sarah thrust a hand in and showed that the space was larger than it seems. Inside the entrance a bunch of moss was attached to it.

[Unidentified thieves hideout] Inside the Brown Rocky area are ruins that have been abandoned a long time ago. It looks like one of the places that are often abandoned. However, traces of people can be found at several different locations. This remains clear that a dangerous group are hiding somewhere within the ruins. If you are going to explore the

ruins, proceed with extreme caution.]

-You have found an undiscovered dungeon. As a new discover, you can gain an additional 700 experience and 30 Fame if you register in the Hall of Fame. Would you like to register?

Ark obviously refused registration and entered.

" This place was a hidden dungeon!"

He's come to the front of the falls before but never found a dungeon.

It was hidden in a place that people wouldn't have imagined.

Of course, this was not the only dungeon. So far, Ark has been in numerous areas with hidden dungeons.

'When I first started the game, I would have missed them '

When Ark first entered New World, he wasn't interested in everything.

He would overlook a suspicious forest or rock. Even a waterfall suddenly appeared in a rocky area then he would've just ignored it.

It is a long game, if you only relied on information that was already discovered that you would be unable to proceed much further.

This was caused by the excessive need to level up.

"But in New World there is a lot of information that is yet unknown.

And that is what you have to figure out by yourself. In the future, I should pay more attention to my surroundings.'

Finishing his self-criticism, Ark turned to Sid and said.

"Sid please set up camp here and wait patiently with Sarah."

"Yes,"

Sid answered and pulled out firewood to create a campfire.

Then Sarah pulled Sid's sleeves and asked.

-Sid-oppa is not fighting?

"Eh? I am a merchant..... "

-Being hit would hurt more

Sarah's sneaked a glance at Sid and then looked down.

"Eueu.....Should have chosen a warrior. . ."

That struck a blow and Sid once again regretted his career choice.

Leaving the two behind, Ark entered the dungeon. The roaring of the waterfall shook the dungeon.

The noise of the waterfall was close enough that it created static around the ears. In addition, every step he took he could feel the tension!

Ark stealthily entered the mouth of the tunnel.

‘That reminds me. ‘

“Dedric, surveillance”.

“Roger, master”

Ark advanced carefully with Dedric ahead of him. However, the dungeon was smaller than he thought. One passage consisted of a circular shape. Besides, no matter how much he looked for a thief, he didn’t even see a mouse.

‘What the? Sarah saw the thieves drag her father here. What was going on? ‘

If so, only one answer remained, there was a secret passage somewhere.

Therefore Ark used the skill Eyes of the Cat to observe the area around him. And after a few moments, he found some bloodstains on the ground.

The blood stains were quite new.....

‘This is it! ‘

It was clear that Sarah’s father was dragged by the thieves and shed some blood.

This means that if he followed the blood trail then he will find the secret passage, Ark reasoned.

The blood stains were sparsely scattered at areas with dead ends.

They were kind enough to show where the secret passage was by splattering a few drops of blood on the walls.

“Is this where the switch is? ‘

Ark peered at the walls and the fall but no matter how meticulously he looked, he could not find the switch. 10 tedious minutes had passed when suddenly the familiar sounds of the waterfall changed.

Ark instinctively pressed his ear to the wall.

“It really.....is boring”

“How longthis wait?”

“Any other way?It’s an order.....While activitiesstay hidden..... ”

“Che,They’re surprisingly cowardly... ..Why should we listen to them? ”

"He.....what skills do you haveif you offend him... .."

"And thenHere tooDo you know "

"Aaa.....That manwe paid compensation that.....words? "

"Now you can harvest soonIf everything goes wellget big profit
.... "

"Huhuhu, indeed....."

"AlthoughI heard rumoursNowadays, the surrounding robbersthere
is a hunter? "

"Aaaa.....HeardNo party.it was said to be alone? "

"A pretty strong guylooks like... ..It's unrelated to us.."

"Damnby such a personand wantI wishbefore I die of
boredom "

Because of the falls the sound was broken but information doesn't really matter to me.
The important thing is that there are thieves inside the secret passage!

"Okay, Dedric, Skull, lurk back around the corner"

Ark commanded in a small voice and they moved to position. And attacked the wall with
his sword.

A deafening bang, and the walls vibrated. He couldn't even scratch the walls but that didn't
matter. Because he hadn't even thought of trying to break the wall.

"Eh? What.....Sound? "

"I heard outside ... something collapsed.....did?"

"Damn ...if entrance collapsesannoying"

"For the time being.....I'll go out"

With a mechanical sound, the wall pushed outwards and rose up.

'What the? Everything's fine? "

"So what was that sound before?"

"Did the stone roll away from the falls or something?"

The 3 thieves appeared and looked around through the secret door.

Ark who had hidden himself using 'stealth' was watching from close by. He came out and quickly approached them, stabbing the thieves with the sword.

-Critical Hit! Backstab effect has increase damage by 200%. The thief will be stunned for 10 seconds.

The vitality of the thieves was reduced by 30% as the quickly hid himself again...

"What, what?"

"The enemy!"

Two thieves panicked and pulled out a sword However, Ark's actions was several times faster.

"Snake, nerve paralysis poison!"

Snake had eaten a poisonous plant and spouted black venom.

The venom flew across the small space and hit the neck of the thieves. And the voice of the loudest thief suddenly stopped.

That tactic was one that they had used and successfully mastered on other thieves.

When using paralysis poison, you can attack the throat and paralyze the vocal cords. When that happens, if the enemy are not organized thieves then their communication will weaken.

"Now, Dedric, Skull! Plan B-1! "

Ark who was hidden in the corner called out a command.

While Ark took care of one enemy and drew their attention, the two pets began the operation, which had a 70-30 offense and defense ratio used to stop the enemy and blocking the enemy's retreat was plan B-1D.

Additionally, the airborne ratio was 50:50 for plan B-2, 20:30 for B-3 and to stop attacking and stop the enemy from retreating was plan B-4. Through countless attacks against thieves, the experienced Dedric and Skull skillfully avoided the thieves' attack.

Meanwhile, Ark violently attacked a thief who stumbled from the onslaught. Once the enemy's organizational skills had been destroyed, they were no match for Ark.

Hunting a user that was a thief was far more difficult that fighting a group of thieves. Their level was 100!

On the other hand, he was only level 85 but the dungeon allowed limited room for the thieves to move. His 30% dark attribute bonus also guaranteed that his stats added up to around level 110. At the same time his skill proficiency increased by 30% and was surprisingly effective.

He also used his Eyes of the Cat skill to search for any weaknesses.

A kick quickly took care of the stumbling thief and attacked the throat of the middle bandit who had been hit with the paralysis poison to stop communication, causing him to fall into critical condition. Once he fell, the final thief opened his mouth and ran away.

Are they trying to request help?

'Don't miss? '

Ark turned and threw something at the legs running away.
Due to the poison the thief's legs became paralyzed and he fell down.
The chances for a double critical hit activated immediately!
Even if he couldn't see it the results were clear.

"Well, this was a fairly decent battle."

When he checked only 30% of his health was shaved off.

But he would have to be careful because he wasn't sure how many thieves were hiding. "

Ark used Eyes of the Cat and activated 'Stealth' while hiding in the secret passageway.
There were also long tunnels that connected from the passage.
Within a few minutes some roads that lead back to a main square room appeared. The square was lined with balconies, each flanked by two thieves standing guard.
The square.
There was no way to avoid being seen from the balconies on both sides and it was impossible to get away undetected. However, that didn't matter to Ark as he has the skill 'stealth.'

'The stairs to go up the balcony can't be seen from here. Then are there more stairs to go up inside the balcony? I better find the stairs to go up where I can remain undetected. '

Ark silently crossed the square.
Although he had 'Stealth' activated, he was still quite nervous when he entered the vicinity of the guards. And just as he was about to cross the square, a situation that had never happened before occurred.
He happened to step on something on the ground.

-A trap has been triggered. Critical Hit! You have received 200 damage.
'Bleed' status. 10 hp will be consumed every 5 seconds for one minute.

He never expected traps.
So far he's never fought against an opponent who used traps, but the problem was not the trap.
The attack had cause him to enter a battle state and the 'Stealth' ability was deactivated. At the moment, the eyes of every thief were concentrated on Ark.

"Intruder!"

"How did you get here?"

"Whatever it doesn't matter! Kill him!"

Two people at a time deliberately lifted their bows, for a total of 4 people. The arrows simultaneously flew from different directions. The situation was one where he couldn't predict and avoid the arrows. However, Ark did not panic. He had experienced this with countless other bandit groups. There was no reason to rush and get upset.

"Dedric, Skull! Plan B-4! "

"The right wing. Ok!"

Crackle!

Dedric and Skull used all their evasive power to avoid the arrows and destroy two. Then, Ark grasped his sword tightly and concentrated on the remaining arrows flying towards him. Just as the arrows were four feet away from him, he turned and swung his sword.

He pushed forward while simultaneously hitting the arrow with his sword... At the moment it struck, he managed to counter attack and successfully pulled off Riposte. He managed to attack a thief faster than the arrows could be shot.

"Gwak, how, the arrow ...!"

The thieves burst out a shocked cry.

After being backed into a corner by the Silver Arrow group, he relentlessly polished the activation rate of his Riposte skill. Thanks to this training, there was a 70% chance that Riposte would activate and parry the arrows.

Once the arrow had been deflected, Riposte was useful in dealing the first blow. If an arrow hits there is a high possibility that an abnormal status will be inflicted. And it's the same for thieves too. If two thieves were hit with arrows, they might get paralysis or slow etc.

In other words, the robbers were also in danger of being hit by the arrows. There was also Dedric and Skull to decrease the burden on Ark.

For Ark, the limit of a flying arrow was two feet.

This was a small enough number that he could use Riposte. When Ark deflected as many as five arrows, the thief's health was decreased by at least 40%. However, it was not a 100% chance.

If Riposte failed to activate then the penalty was numbness of the body.

When the arrow hits, his health was slowly decreased until it was almost 50%.

" There are four people left. In his state, the success rate of riposte was down. If this goes on for longer than I am at a disadvantage. '

Then, while he was flying around and evading arrows, Dedric noticed something and exclaimed.

"The switch is here!"

“Huh? That guy!”

“Hihihi, he discovered the proper design. What is this? It’s like, what? ”

Clink, Kurururung!

With a smile, Dedric avoided the thieves and the arrows and took out the switch. With a sound, the balcony lowered to the ground like an elevator. The machine was built to act separately from the stairs.

“Well done Dedric!”

An eerie light shone in Ark’s eyes.

A muffled scream was heard as Ark pulled his dagger from the thief standing in front of him. And the NPC archers were no match for a dagger wielding Ark.

Ark immediately finished the four archers on the ground.

‘Hyuu.....Nevertheless the party quest was quite difficult.

The thieves were high level and had the geographical advantage. If it hadn’t been for his experience hunting bandit groups, Ark would have probably been the one lying on the ground.

‘Maybe it was fortunate that I discovered this place late. ‘

Ark used food to restore his health and Mana to 100% before moving to the stairs.

He walked more cautiously than the first time he entered.

“ I never thought there would be traps in the cave’

The biggest problem is that it is a trap.

Fortunately the damage done by the trap was minimal. However, he cannot guarantee that the next trap he encounters would be at the same level. Even just an alarm ringing through the cave could cause serious problems.

However, even if Ark found a trap it would be difficult to deactivate it.

The trap-related skills belong to professions like Archers or Explorers who search through ruins.

In New World, it was impossible to get everything for free. However, for those who don’t have the required professions the success rate is less than 10%. Therefore the party shape for dungeons requires the right combination of professions.

‘What if? He couldn’t avoid the traps ‘

Ark began to get worried.

It was then that Skull came forward and stumbled on an idea.

Skull had complete loyalty!

But when Snake evolved, Skull was utilized less. Skull was only used when Ark picked him up to throw or biting ankles.

Although he had a lot of stamina and strength due to food, he had no arms and legs to attack.

Because of that, in recent times Skull had become quite depressed.

Skull could not recognize the expression on his master's face.

Ark thought that this was really a difficult situation.

"What happened to Skull?"

Crackle!

Skull was bravely prepared and rolled stumbling forward. He rolled forward a few feet until there was a snapping sound and a rain of arrows shot from the walls.

However, the people who installed the traps never would have thought that a skull would be the one activating it.

Of course the arrows were aimed at a human height and shape.

"Yes! There is that method!!"

Crackle! Crackle!

The skull proudly stumbled forwards.

"Okay, Skull. You will put out the traps. "

After that, Skull always rolled 10 meters in front of him to check for traps.

Of course, arrows shot out or a sword was swung and there was even items falling from the sky. However, Skull had high stamina and survived all the traps. In addition, Ark did not have to worry about an alarm when a trap was triggered.

Even if a number of traps were triggered, he did not enter a battle state.

Therefore, he used 'Stealth' and just hid from any thieves. On the other hand, Skull could simply be unsummoned to deceive the thieves.

'What the? Why did the traps activate? "

"There's no one around?"

"Damn, did a rodent touch it or something?"

The thieves floated around the perimeter for several minutes before returning to their positions. Therefore, Ark found a way to cope with similar dungeons.

The dungeon has a relatively simple structure.

A long passage with open up to a large room with archers. There were also 3-4 thieves waiting in the room.

The large room had various combinations of thieves, but Ark had already figured out the combinations. He properly activated the machine then went on and defeated the enemies.

He passed through 10 or more room.

Then unusually the normal long passage ended before two huge doors.

‘This is the boss’s room? ‘

It was different from the traps. He knew that if he opened the doors then enemies would appear.

Ark checked his equipment and carefully opened the door.

Although the sound of the waterfall echoed loudly in the dungeon, the creaking sound of the unusually large doors opening was clearly audible.

“What the hell!”

A sharp sound was heard from the side where a variety of tools were scattered.

The first thing he saw was the black robe covering the body. However, it was not a human NPC or a humanoid monster...the face that was revealed between the hood was surprisingly that of a reptile.

At the same time, a warning message flashed before his eyes.

-The Boss monster ‘ Mysterious Conjurer Kirk’ has appeared.

The yellow eyes like a snake rolled around and stared at Ark.

“You are the bounty hunter? No, you shouldn’t have taken the reward....Well it doesn’t matter. Anyone that comes here won’t be allowed to leave alive!

Kirk was also a level 100 thief. However, a boss monster is never an opponent that can be ignored.

Also a level +E difficulty boss monster could be compared to Adelaine. However, Ark had already defeated Adelaine a while ago.

Ark snorted and grinned.

“That is not something that you will decide.”

“Impertinent, how dare a human talk like that?”

Flash-!

Kirk chanted a spell and 3-4 light rays emerged.

It was a low-level magic energy bolt that was learned when you changed professions to magician.

While a warrior used a sword, it was the primary magic attack spell for magicians. However, if it is a couple of shots flying at the same time then he couldn’t ignore it.

Ark rolled to the ground to avoid the damage. He also used Riposte to deflect the magic.

Putt putt POW!

“Ugh, this, unbelievable!”

Kirk wobbled and retreated.

‘That’s it. Riposte also works on magic! So there was a way for him to win! ’

“Dedric, Skull! Plan A-2! ”

He commanded as Ark, Dedric and Skull spread in three directions. They maintained a certain distance while Kirk’s gaze moved wildly between them. Naturally the attacks came flying at Ark who used Riposte as much as possible to parry and counter attack.

Kirk began to use more powerful spells. However, the more powerful the spell is the longer it takes for the magic to cast.

The ball shaped fireball magic was easier to successful Riposte than the energy bolts.

Double bang!

When the fireball was repelled back to Kirk, his health decreased by 10%. Even if he was a boss monster, the trait of a magician was its low defense.

“I was nervous because it was the same level boss as Adelaine but he’s not so hard. No, is it because I’ve become stronger? Anyway this degree of difficulty should be no problem! ’

With his confidence boosted, Ark’s concentration also increased and he returned even more magic.

However, there was something Ark hadn’t considered.

The boss monster’s racial special skill. After around 5 minutes, Kirk’s health had been reduced to 50%.

When his attack magic did not hit, Kirk spat out curses with a harsh voice and started to chant a long spell.

“God dammit, human prepare to be immobilized!”

“”Dedric, Skull! Prepare to stop him from finishing the spell.

Ark had felt something sinister and shouted.

However, before Dedric and Skull could interrupt, Kirk’s magic had been completed.

“Mimicry!”

At the moment, Kirk’s appearance changed and he disappeared.

Ark looked carefully at the surroundings.

Suddenly the figure had vanished. Ark could use ‘stealth’ but this appeared to be a different skill. Because ‘stealth’ could not be used in battle. In addition, the Eyes of the Cat

were a skill that could see anything that was hidden through level magic, but it could not find any traces of Kirk. Kirk could also use magic even while he was hidden.

“The crystalized rock crystals arise!”

He heard Kirk’s voice from coming from an unexpected place.

Then all of a sudden, the ground rose up and golems the size of humans formed. They were approximately level 50 but there were enough of them to fill the room.

The golems came out and the situation immediately changed.

Kwa Kwa Kwa bang, bang!

The golems surrounded Ark from all directions and attacked.

Since they were only level 50 they didn’t do a lot of damage. However, that was different for his level 40 summons. Although they tried to avoid all the attacks, every time they were hit than health was drained. He never expected such magic from Kirk.

‘Damn, what kind of technology is this? ‘

Ark struck a golem which was replaced by another one.

Ark was suffering from a situation where the enemy couldn’t be seen.

The last time was when the squid shot out black ink underwater. The only way he made a fatal blow was by looking at the flow of the current and following it. However, he couldn’t use that method with Kirk.

There were more than 20 golems running around the way and there was no way to look for traces of Kirk.

Kwajik!

The situation couldn’t continue for much longer as first Skull was stepped on by golems before Dedric who was surrounded by golems disappeared as well. All the attention turned to Ark who received additional damage and was soon in a critical state.

‘I was wrong, I can’t win like this! ‘

Ark hurriedly turned and tried to exit the room.

“Kukukuk, did you think I would miss that? Go loyal servants!”

The golems obeyed and pursued him out of the room. Kirk hid between the golems and his voice was heard chanting a spell.

Ark turned and stared.

‘Riposte! ‘

Ark’s goal was to strike all the golems with his counterattack.

The terrain in front of the room was a narrow passage. In addition, the opponent was a medium sized golem.

The golem who was hit with Riposte flew backwards into the crowded area and collided with the golems behind it.

Strike!

The entangled golems fell like dominoes.

“Uhh, this bastard ...!”

And Kirk who was hiding somewhere between the golems had his magic cancelled. Meanwhile, arc ran frantically down the passage. After he ran away for 1 minute then the battle state disappeared.

Ark immediately hid himself with ‘stealth.’

“Oh damn ...! Where is this guy hiding? Golem, sweep through the surrounding area. He must still be lurking around here somewhere! ”

After a brief period of time, the voice of Kirk was heard among the golems. However, he still did not have a way to attack when Kirk is in a mimic state.

Ark had returned to the secret passage using ‘stealth.’ When he checked the info window, it was not a joke.

The durability of all his armour was at the lowest point due to the durability and strength of the golems. Even if he used the magic restoration spell to repair the equipment, the maximum durability would still be reduced.

With tears in his eyes, Ark had to use the repair box which he normally avoided using due to low stock and cost.

But the problem isn’t repairing his equipment.

‘What is an alternative method? ’

Before he had to run away. However, the situation from before wasn’t good. He was already using mimicry and then he summoned golems. On the other hand, Ark had also lost Dedric and Skull. The results meant they had to fight again.

‘Damn it, even if he doesn’t have golems there is still the problem of mimicry ’

The biggest problem was that Kirk had special racial skill mimicry. If he keeps fighting in the invisible state than there is no way to attack him.

‘When it was underwater there was still a way of attacking ’

He was thinking about his experience fighting underwater when an idea sprang to his head.

Black ink!

Why had he never thought of that?

That right, if they are invisible then you should make it so that they can be seen! ‘

Ark stood up and went to the entrance of the dungeon. At the entrance, Sid was dozing against the wall while Sarah peered with worried eyes at the dungeon.
When you're dead then you can nap comfortably.....

“Eh? Ark-nim! Have you finished?”

“No, the boss was stronger than I thought.”

Ark spoke bluntly in a curt voice and Sarah gave him a concerned look.

“It's okay. I'll do everything I can to save your father. ”

Ark said with a smile while Sid looked worried.

“Sid, I'll need your help to defeat the boss.”

“Yes? But I'm a ”

“I'm not asking you to fight. That thing? Only that will be given”

Ark said with a smile.

“You fool, you came back to die!”

When Ark entered the secret passage, Kirk's voice was heard. And the golems flocked to him.

In a moment, Ark hit a golem with riposte and sent it flying in the direction of the audible voice.

“Kukukuk. No matter how much you rack your brains it's not use. If you can't see me then you can't catch me!”

Kirk had already fled several meters away from where he was laughing. Then a cold smile spread on Ark's face.

“Then I just have to look”

Ark's hand moved quickly.

Ark removed a big package from his bag and threw it in the air. And swinging his sword, he burst the package causing colourful liquids to fly everywhere. At that time Kirk gave an embarrassed scream.

“Dye!”

The item splashing all over the place was very colourful liquid dyes. Ark had collected the dye using Sid’s sewing skills. And by blowing it in the air. The dye scattered in many directions. As a result, the deserted dungeon underwent a home renovation with various colours splattered all over like a rainbow.

“Ugh, this is unbelievable!”

The not so agile Kirk couldn’t avoid all the dye and looked like a rainbow lizard. Ark lifted his sword and smiled.

“Pretty good? So nowlet’s fight fair and square? ”

“Golems kill him!”

“Seems the lizard can’t guess the situation”

Ark quickly narrowed the distance using Riposte. Then the golem was hit and forced back to the wall with Kirk. Due to that golem, Kirk was a difficult goal for Ark. This was because it could hide among the golems without being seen. However, when mimicry was broken the situation changed.

“Snake, nerve paralysis poison!”

Ark swung his poison coated sword at Kirk’s neck. Thanks to the vocal cord paralysis, Kirk couldn’t chant his magic. In addition, he couldn’t give orders to the golems so their actions became unorganized. Kirk was on the defensive and in a hurry ran away. However, Ark used Riposte on the golem and aimed it to hit Kirk. With his vocal cords barely unparalyzed, Kirk angrily shouted.

“Fools! Every golem is stupid! ”

“Oi, oi, your character is the worst. Your summonses are risking their lives to fight for you. You should value them.

Although Ark did summon his pets to feed them horrible food. After a few minutes of fighting, Kirk was in critical condition.

“Rain, come and nourish me! Let’s leave. Humans! Acceleration! ”

Kirk cast a spell of acceleration and headed towards the rear. Although Ark hurriedly rushed through the golems, the acceleration had doubled Kirk's speed and he was already around the corner.

There was a waterfall outside the dungeon.

If he washes the dye off at the waterfall then the situation will not change.

"Damn childish lizard who can't die without causing problems,"

Ark cursed and chased after Kirk.

Meanwhile, Kirk was running towards the entrance of the dungeon.

"Hik, what is that?"

Sid was standing at the entrance with an uneasy look when he shrieked as a rainbow coloured lizard came running out and pushed him out of the way.

"Get out of the way, Hobbit!"

Kirk ran while frantically chanting magic. And just trying to shoot a huge fireball, he flinched and fell forward.

"What, what?"

Ark followed with an evil smile on his face.

"What a fool! Did he think I wouldn't have any countermeasures?"

"No, no waya trap?"

"I learned from you."

Although to be exact, it wasn't a trap.

Due to their profession, Ark and Sid couldn't install traps successfully.

However, a certain freedom of action was possible in New World. So what they came up with was a needle using Sid's sewing profession!

Before Ark entered the dungeon, he laid out a series of needles coated with Snake's venom on the ground at the entrance.

It wasn't a high level trap but Ark took advantage of the fact that Kirk would have to run through the entrance barefoot.

"Do it, no way! I with a needle.....!"

"It doesn't look good if you're too persistent. Just simply accept your death"

"Don't make me laugh! I'm the great "

With his two stiff legs, Kirk quickly tried to chant a spell.
However, wielding his sword Ark was several times faster.

“Take this, Dark blade!”

There was an audible sound as the sound penetrated Kirk’s chest.
The mimicry faded away and his original features returned as his body slowly disappeared.

-Your level has risen.

When Kirk disappeared, a welcome message popped up stating that he was level 86.
He could also see the cross shape on Sid’s head, a sign that he had levelled up.
Sid was too far away to receive the party experience from the thieves in the
dungeon. Thanks to that, Ark was able to receive 100% of the additional experience
received for killing thieves in a party.
By taking advantage of this fact during his battles against the previous bandit groups, he
was able to raise 7 levels in 9 days. However, Kirk died in front of Sid so the experience
would be equally distributed.

‘Well, in this situation you deserve the experience but’

“I finally finished. And Sid you performed well by deceiving the fellow.”

Ark said as he crouched beside Sid who was on the ground. Then Sid stood up and with a
face brimming with tears replied.

“It’s really scary!”

“What is, this ...’

Was the person who reached level 60 as a merchant a game novice? He wondered about the
real status of Sid. But anyway the boss was defeated thanks to Sid’s help. Ark gave Sid a pat
and excitedly examined the items dropped from the boss.

Dark robe (Magic) Armour type: Robe Defense power: 20 Durability: 4/40 Weight: 10 User
restriction: Level 70 or more A mysterious magic robe made of silk, magic spirit is imbued in
the silk to help calm the mind. A calm spirit can increase concentration substantially and
help the magic unfold smoothly. {Option: Magic success rate + 20%, Magic casting speed +
20%}

-The thief’s key The Winning Necklace: Level 70 Quest starting item A necklace made of a
material that vaguely detects magic. You can check the quest commissioned by the Magic
Institute.

The boss monster had dropped one equipment item.
It’s for magic use only but it has good options that should make it sell fairly well.

‘I bet the key is related to Sarah’s quest but this necklace... ..?’

Ark stared at the Winning Necklace.

The necklace material detects magic and the glass heart beads were sealed and protected in the same material. In addition, it was a quest starting item.

In other words, if someone had defeated this dungeon and found the quest item then they could bring it to the magic society and receive the same quest Ark had.

‘Yes and if he had originally found this dungeon first then he could’ve swept through the dungeon and recieved the quest. By doing the Event Quest, he earned a high level of friendship with the Magic Institute and therefore did the quest in the wrong order. ‘

In other words, this was the original intention behind the bandit groups. Ark considered this with a frown.

“But wait, this is a quest starting item? So somewhere in the dungeon is the Heartsoul Bead? Because the boss dropped a quest starting item for the Heartsoul Bead, it means that he is entering the starting phase of the quest.....’

Maybe the Magic Institute’s quest was longer than Ark thought.

Ark summarized the dungeon and returned to the boss’ room with Sid and Sarah.

In the room there was a different secret passage attached.

By following the route, it eventually led past a pool to the prison.

More than 10 people were trapped inside the prison.

When Ark used the key to open a door, Sarah ran to a middle aged man who had tears brimming in his eyes when he saw here.

He was Sarah’s father.

“You’re still alive, so everything’s great”

Sid was thrilled by the sight.

“Rain, out of my way!”

“Eek?”

Some unexpected developments occurred.

The middle-aged man pushed Sarah to the side and ran towards a bush. He was not the only one.

The prisoners that were not seen by Ark and his companions seemed crazy as they also rushed to the bush by the pool and ate the grass. And they seemed lightheaded as they sat down and stared at something spellbound.

The same thing happened to the middle-aged man. Sarah was too embarrassed to show any expression on her face.

“Ah, Ark-nim?”

Sid looked at him puzzled.

Ark looked at them for a while before approaching the bush they were scattered around.

The key for Ark was the bizarre shape of the plants that were growing. Their strange behaviour was probably related to the plants.

He used ingredient identification on some of the plants and opened up the skill's information window.

Nurunma Leaf (Ingredient) A plant that grows in the special environment of the island. The leaves have an anaesthesia effect and can be refined to tablets to create a superior remedy. But at the same time it contains strong addictive and hallucinogenic ingredients in large quantities. The final drug like effect relies on the purification process. When just the leaf is eaten, in the past warriors just it as a stimulant however once it became an addiction then their guard was easy to break. Due to the severe effects, the production and distribution of this stimulant was banned across every continent.

“This is a drug as expected”

“A drug?”

“Yes, somehow all these people are addicted to drugs.”

Ark nodded and murmured.

Now a picture of the situation was drawn in his head.

The reason why the thieves remained concealed in the ruins and didn't move for 1 year.

Someone had probably told them that the Nurunma plant grew in these ruins.

The thieves began to grow it in order to start drug production and gain a big profit.

“They probably kidnapped travellers and locked them in the jail to be used as an effective drug trail. And Sarah's father too... ..”

“.....!”

During the conversation between the two, Sarah's face turned pale and terrified.

Sarah's father had been kidnapped at little over two days ago in game time, and two days ago he was fine but now he's a drug addict.

Sarah cried at the reality that her father was just one middle aged man seeing hallucinations.

Then Sid who could not overlook a crying face asked.

“Ah, Ark-nim?” Isn’t there a way? At this rate... ”

“Certainly, if left alone then it could be a big problem.”

Ark replied, scratching his head.

This situation was really difficult. He had defeated a group of thieves and in the end rescued Sarah’s father.

But the middle aged man who should have given him his reward was instead a saliva dripping man addicted to drugs. In addition, the quest for the Magic Institute required him in his normal condition.

I don’t know whether this will work but I have no choice but to try it’

“Everybody please be steady. The pleasure that you’re feeling now is not right. It is the temptation of the devil that will lead you to eventually ruin your body and your mind. Please steady your heart and resist the temptation. You can do it”

Ark used his nursing skill.

However, there was no reaction from the addicts.

They were too immersed in their hallucinations that Ark’s voice was not even audible to them. And after a while, the effects of the Nurunman leaves they ate wore off and moving their bodies like a zombie, they stood up to grab more leaves.

“Stop! Wake up! ”

“.....!”

Sid and Sarah tried to stop them but it was no use.

The addicts were furiously beating each other up to get to the Nurunma leaves. The surprising thing to Ark was that their resilience. Even when they were knocked down, they just got up again like they could feel no pain

Even if they only had 1% health left, they still crawled on the ground in order to put the Nurunman leaf in their mouth. If he left then the situation would just repeat itself until all the plants in the ruins were gone.

‘Damn, is this why drug addiction is so frightening? However he could not have them killing each other....looking at the situation maybe it is better to put them back in their prison?’

Suddenly a thought flashed in Ark’s head.

‘If so, this might be the best method.....!’

Ark immediately took out his pot and cooked a dish.

While the addicts were eating the Nurunman leaves, he was just leisurely cooking and Sid and Sarah shared a puzzled and absurd look.

But they couldn't ignore the sight and soon 15 portions of food were produced that gave off a strange smell.

"Ok Sid, Sarah, catch the people and feed them this food using force if necessary!"

"Yes? But what...? "

"I'll give you an explanation later after you quickly feed them!"

Ark shouted and caught 1 addict, pressing the food to his mouth. He struck the struggling addict, forcing his mouth open and shoving the food in, with Sid and Sarah immediately following. The effect was immediate, the addicts who ate the food staggered and vomited out the Nurunma leaves.

"Ugh, ugh, uwееееek!"

An addict who ate another Nurunma leaf vomited again.

'It is like I thought! '

Ark's eyes twinkled.

Ark had made the 'Appetite Killing Stew.'

It was a stew that tastes so bad that it is impossible to eat any other food for 2 hours or they would throw up. If you tried to eat food by force then it would be thrown up and it also had the additional bonus of decreasing the effects of the eaten food.

'The Nurunma leaves also counts as consumed food. Eating it poisons you and causes hallucinations. In other words, in New World drug addiction can be seen as a food effect '

When the Nurunma leaves have been eaten and thrown up, it is also possible for the Appetite Killing Stew to weaken the drug addiction effect.....or so Ark thought.

It was a hit.

After eating and vomiting the Nurunma leaves dozens of times, the pupils of the drug addicts started to clear up.

It was only a slight change but now there was hope.

'Ok, from now on it is a battle of patience! '

The opponents are drug addicts. However, they wouldn't recover easily even if it was a game.

Ark made food and steadily fed it to them as well as using his Nursing skill on the addicts whenever possible.

It lasted over 6 hours.

By that time, Sarah had failed to sleep properly for more than two days and the NPC slept against the wall along with Sid. Ark too wanted to close his eyes and faint from the exhaustion.

However, Ark clenched his mouth and with red eyes continued making food for 15 people while firing off his nursing skill randomly.

‘The quest is almost complete. What is sleep?’

The time limit was almost over and he just wanted to finish the quest as soon as possible! And his obsession finally evoked a miracle.

“You can overcome the temptation of the devil if you will it. Win for yourselves and for the ones waiting for you. Right now is the time to show your willingness for the ones you love.

How many times? Due to the exhaustion it was hard to even count how many times he had used the Nursing skill.

A blue light emerged from his body. It hung down from the addict’s face to reveal the shadows that had melted away.

The Miracle Nursing was successful Without sparing your body, you devoted yourself to their care and saved many from a fate of despair. A sick person does not only suffer from disease and injury. People addicted to drugs and tempted by the pleasure are not able to escape with their own strength. They are also sick and suffering. Even so, they do not know that they are sick. Nursing people who don’t know that they are sick is no easy task. No matter what, the only remedy that can save them is tenacity and patience. Without taking your eyes off the time limit, you poured infinite care and affection on them with amazing patience. Although penetrating the heart with words is important, truly caring for the sick requires a steady patience. Now the sick will learn from your patience and win against the temptation of the Nurunma leaves.

* Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats are increase by 1.

* The Affection stat increased by 10.

* Fame increased by 50.

* Alignment towards Good increased by 50.

The Miracle Nursing was a success and you have acquired the title ‘Committed Caretaker.’ Fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients* As a title bonus, all stats increase by 1*Fame increased by 50

‘I, I did it!’

With an exhausted face, Ark sat down with a thud.

At that time, Sid and Sarah raised their head to the light. After waking up from his hallucinations, the middle-aged man gazed at Sarah and stuttered.

“Oh.....Oh, Sarah, Sarah! Thank goodness!”

Sarah opened her mouth before running to join the middle aged man in a tight hug while crying.

Sid watched the reunion with tears in his eyes.

“Ah, Ark-nim” You really did it! ”

Ark silently nodded his head.

Ark had originally only done it to complete the quest, but looking at Sarah’s face he felt a sense of accomplishment.

The heart with which a parent regards their child or the child their parents is still the same no matter if they are a person or a NPC. He thought back to when he was treating the addicts with cold eyes until he saw Sarah sleeping with tears streaming down her face.

The Nursing skill didn’t rely on the skill level or the number of uses. For disease stricken NPCs, caring for them sincerely and compassionately is required for Nursing to succeed. Maybe his change of heart was the reason why Miracle Nursing succeeded.

‘If it wasn’t for Sarah then the miracle nursing probably wouldn’t have succeeded.’

That said, however, it did succeed.

Anyway, now he would be able to complete the quest to rescue her father. He explained the general situation. Hanson approached Ark.

“You are Ark and Sid? I really thank you. You rescued my daughter and you even saved me. I don’t know how to express my gratitude.”

“ Obviously with a reward.... ’

Ark swallowed the words that came to his mind.

“It was a natural thing. Anyway I’m just relieved that it turned out to alright”

“Oo! A man like you still exists in this barren world. But I can’t feel comfortable if I just accept your help. I want to give you something but I don’t have it at the moment.....”

Hanson had been searching all through his pockets and bag.

‘Please think! There must be something! Please look for it! ’

Ark’s cheers showed an effect.

After a while Hanson remembered the leather pouch attached to his waist and lifted it.

“I’m sorry I only have something like this. It is only one as well. But fortunately for me it is a special talent. It is tips for making a map. Or if you’re carrying this leather pouch, other people with a knack for it will tell you their tips to making maps. This would be useful for a foreigner like you. ”

You can select your reward.1. Cartography (Skill Initiation)Map can be made using Cartographer Hanson’s skills.If the user you learnt the skill has a pen and paper, they will automatically draw a place down. Also, villages, the geography and any major information about a dungeon visited are automatically recorded.When a map showing the terrain and

information of each area or dungeon is 100% completed, a paper map can be created. This map scroll will be able to be sold to other players or NPC general stores. However, once sold the map information disappears.² Hanson's leather pouch
It can hold 25% of the capacity of a basic bag

'Hoo., so I can choose the reward?'

Ark confirmed the information with shining eyes.
He had looked at Hanson and didn't have big expectations. However, which reward would be more useful? In big cities a magic bag with 1/4 of the capacity of a basic bag was sold for 200 gold! Therefore he could earn 200 gold with that reward.

"People are always going to be lacking bags"

Ark swallowed his excess saliva with a gulp.
However, what captured Ark's attention was the cartography skill. The basic map given to a user does not register the terrain of a dungeon. In complicated dungeons, his usual method was to familiarize himself by wandering around.
However, if he had the cartography skill he wouldn't have to waste time wandering over the same routes. In addition, when you complete it 100% you can sell the maps. Of course the more complicated and challenging dungeon maps would be sold at a more expensive price. Bags might be coveted but they are not useful in games and therefore cannot be compared, because the cartography skill could also earn him money.

'Yes, money can buy items but rare skills. It cannot be compared'

After Ark made a decision he looked at Sid. As expected Sid was also drooling over the cartography skill.
Indeed, if registered to a map the town's information would be useful to merchants. It would not be easy to concede it to Ark.

"Sid because you are a merchant you'll need more bags of course"

"Yes? No, I'm....."

"It's ok. I'll just choose the first option. I'll have what's left."

Ark smiled as he spoke causing Sid to flinch. He was laughing but Sid noticed an unidentified light in his eyes.

"Don't be burdened. I didn't do that much to finish this request, just fought against thieves and almost died! Sid was also sleeping when I was busy treating the addicts' suffering throughout the night. But don't be nervous and take what you want. Hahaha, It's between me and Sid. Right? So please choose the better option. This is the bag of course"

Whenever Ark spoke, Sid felt small wounds puncturing him. And after staring at Ark for a while, he blew a sigh and gave an awkward smile.

"Oh, that's right, what, justI need a bag"

"I knew it"

So Ark conceded the bad (?) which Sid received and was very happy (?) and it was done. And Ark learned the cartography skill from Hanson and a message window popped up.

-'Rescue Sarah's dad! 'The quest has been completed.-Your level has risen.

Even though the quest difficulty was +E, completion of the quest caused his level to rise. Once Ark had completed the quest he asked.

"Have you maybe seen anything special about this place?"

"Something special?"

"Yes, it wouldn't be anything big. Something between the size of a ball and a fist? Well, that would be the approximate size. And because it would have protection there might be a sinister aura coming from it. Are you reminded of anything? "

"Well?"

After thinking for a while, Hanson opened his mouth.

"Oh, that reminds me. When I first came here, I saw something suspicious. Some round objects that were contained in an iron box, wrapped in a black cloth inscribed with funny characters I haven't seen before. I also felt fear to the degree that my body kept on trembling. At the time, I thought I was frightened because I had just been caught by the thieves. But now thinking back, that strange feeling seemed to be coming from that stuff.

"That's it! Where is it now?"

"The man with red hair took it."

"The man with red hair?"

"Yes, he also radiated an ominous aura. A red aura covered his body and he also had red hair. The thieves' boss also used an honorific word for him. I heard the spirit but not the details. He was also the one to give me to the thieves. Your stupid man got caught infiltrating. Tell them to be more careful"

The situation fit. Hanson's words caused Ark to remember the thieves' conversation in the secret passage that Ark eavesdropped on.

In the middle of the thieves' neutral words they said 'he.' Perhaps the person they were referring to was the man with red hair. And the thief who got caught outside was the one that had infiltrated Giran last time.

"Do you know where he went?"

"Let's see.....He went north ofBrandt mountainsbeyond the Angora Cliffs...
... ..Ah, yes Kairote. That's right. If it is near the Angora Cliffs in the Brandt Mountains
then the only place it could be was Cairo. No doubt, he was a cartographer"

"Cairo?"

Ark looked at Sid with a slightly surprised face.

Prior to meeting Sid, he had never heard of Cairo.

It was a lawless city where chaotic users gathered. However, Ark had been unable to figure out the location of Cairo.

He had heard that chaotic users in Cairo automatically received event quests. Of course, Ark did not want to become chaotic just to find out the location of Cairo.

"Do you happen to know the location of Cairo?"

"Of course. I couldn't call myself a cartographer if I didn't know the location of a city. If you'll let me display the location on the map"

Hanson nodded and a map window automatically opened.

It was open to Giran's northern area and a red dot pointed to the middle of the Brandt Mountains.

"Ok, I've collected all of the required information now. Now all that's left is to report back to the Magic Institute.

"Well, let's get out of here."

Dungeons frustrated Sid because they were not familiar to him.

But there were still people in the prison and Hanson's face still signs of hesitation. Ark tilted his head and asked.

"Which reminds meWhy are the people still like that? They don't seem pleased...it's like they're not even aware that they have been saved"

"That's probably"

Hanson explained with a sigh.

The people in the prison were people who wandered the continent or were kidnapped like Hanson. Unlike Hanson who had only been addicted for two days, most of these people have been addicted for years and lost most of their memory.

“When you are looking at a few minutes a day without the dayAlthough the symptoms are different for everyone, some are so severe that they can’t even remember their own name. So they are frightened of where to go after they leave here. If it was just a little bit later, I would have been just like them too. I would have even failed to recognize my daughter..... ”

Just imagining the fearful thought, Hanson hugged Sarah harder.

“Bastards!”

Sid clenched his fist in anger.

Well, yes but he still looked cute

However, compared to Sid’s fury, Ark’s eyes glittered.

‘ Ho-Oh! Then these people are little lost sheep? ’

Ark’s ability to connect his quests and maximize profits was triggered.

Ark’s tongue seemed as smooth as oil.

“That’s a shame. They shouldn’t be abandoned just before they suffered such a horrible thing. But it is fortunate. There is a place called Lancel Village that knows me. It is a good place where the courageous people always greet a new neighbour. Even if you are a person with lost memories, the people of the pioneer village would be delight to welcome you. So let’s take them there? ”

“Lancel! It is still there?”

Hanson the cartographer stared with surprised eyes.

Ark roughly explained what happened to Lancel and Hanson nodded.

“I see. Nevertheless you are not an average person. Yes, in this situation I better take them to Lancel Village. Now you don’t have to worry anymore. I will take responsibility for bringing them to Lancel Village. Although the body is not in the best condition, as a cartographer I use magic to avoid the monsters just like a normal magician.

“Yes that would be great. Tell them that I sent you to Lancel Village. Somebody called Galen will look after them. ”

“I see”

Hanson nodded and a quest updated.

Find New Settlers ‘ quest has been updated.You rescued these poor people who were caught by thieves. And referred those who lost their memories to Lancel, the pioneer village. Of course, Lancel requires a lot of manpower and will welcome them as residents wholeheartedly.Like a newborn baby, they cannot remember anything. However, they will

remember that you have found them a new home. They decided to respect your intention and be reborn as a resident of Lancel.{New settlers found: 25% complete}

Because they lost their memories they were not counted as settlers with special abilities. However, the achievement still increased by 10%.

He was getting closer to completing the quest. Ark summed up the situation and left the party leaving the dungeon to Sid.

Ark remained in the dungeon because there was still work to be done.

‘These are all the drug ingredients?’

The remaining Ark looked at the Nurunma leaves and laughed.

The thieves had secretly cultivated rare plants!

Ark’s keen senses smelled the scent of money. Of course, the leaves of the Nurunma plant were now useless.

Even if it is a drug, it would still make an excellent ingredient to make a superior remedy. He wouldn’t be able to sell it at stores in cities. Even if the NPC bought it then he would just be dragged to the guards and arrested.

” But what if the laws don’t apply to the city? ”

He had already heard about Cairo through Hanson.

After meeting the Magic Institute, the quest would probably lead him to the lawless city of Cairo, where prohibited items from the continent would probably be sold.

‘Drugs would be a little concerning but ’

Ark had encountered chaotic players many times. Chaotic NPCs and users ran wild in Cairo, so he felt no remorse selling Nurunma leaves there.

And wouldn’t it become a treatment pill if refined well?

It they determined that the drug was a remedy, than the NPC shops in Cairo would take the lot. After that Ark is not responsible for it.

Although this was slightly different, the Korean’s favourite seasoning pepper was first recognized as a poison.

According to the Japanese, when the Japanese invasion was defeated, people tried to destroy the plants. However, their forefathers were clever and used the peppers to develop a famous food culture worldwide.

After all, that’s not important. What are important are the intentions of the people who utilize it.

‘As long as I write that the seasoning can be poisonous! ’

Armed with that thought, Ark used his extraction skill and collected the Nurunma leaves.

After he had finished collecting the Nurunma leaves in bundles of 200, he had a total of 1600! Even if one sells for 10 silver then he would still receive 160 gold.

Even if he fell down a well, Ark would never leave empty-handed.

After exiting the dungeon, Sid and Hanson's companions gathered. When Sarah approached to give a farewell greeting, she bent and kissed his cheek. And Ark blushed as red as a beetroot.

-Really thank you

It was a sudden surprise but it didn't feel bad. Sid waited with an expectant expression. However, Sarah turned away with a flick of her tongue and left with Hanson. Sid blankly stared with dumb surprise before raising his voice angrily at Ark.

"Ark, you too!"

Act 6 : Lawless City of Kairote

"Draconian clan?"

Shannen from the Magic Institute asked in surprise after hearing your report.

"Yes, it looked like it was a lizard-like species"

"I never thought the Draconian clan would be involved with the Heartsoul Bead. However if he used mimicry he might have been able to steal the Heartsoul Bead. "

"What kind of species is the Draconian anyway?"

"They areNo, it's not. It's still too early to come to conclusions when you are still unsure. I'm sorry but for the moment can you keep quiet about the Draconian' involvement ".

"That's not a difficult job but"

Actually he had no interest in the lizard.

"The problem is the Heartsoul Bead."

Shannen began to talk with a serious expression.

"I was never sure what those who stole the Heartsoul Bead knew about it. But based on your story, they seem to have a purpose for stealing the Heartsoul Bead. If so, I'm afraid the problem is more serious than I thought"

"There are a lot of ways it can be misused."

Shannen reached out his sweaty palms and grasped Ark's hands.

"Please. You're the only one I can rely on. The Merchant Guild and Warrior Guild have already begun to suspect the situation. We have no way to chase after the Red Man because if caught the Magic Institute's position in society will be damaged. In addition, the protection around the relic has been damaged therefore the situation is unknown. "

"I see what you're saying."

Ark nodded and replied.

"I never thought about abandoning a task once I have started it. Fortunately, the cartographer gave me a clue to the whereabouts of the Red Man so before it is too late I will find the Heartsoul Bead. "

The reason for Ark was of course the reward.

From Shannen's reaction to the quest he could smell the scent of money.

It could be a huge disaster if the situation is prolonged? If you resolve such a problem then it would be extremely profitable.

But was that all? Since the beginning of quest, he received a great deal of experience from being in a party. The Nurunman leaf was only one of his rewards!

Yes, it was a quest that laid golden eggs!

And Shannen did not even realise the reason behind his acceptance.

"After Jackson, how could I not believe in you?"

After Shannen spoke a new message window popped up.

Quest updated. Find the Heartsoul Bead = Find the Heartsoul Bead II You found further clues to the Heartsoul Bead in the ruins where unidentified robbers were hiding. The mysterious Red Man associated with the thieves seems to have taken the Heartsoul Bead towards Cairo. The key to all the events lies with the Red Man. After collecting more information from him, bring back the Heartsoul Bead. Difficulty level: C

'Anyway, that's the first checkpoint passed. Is that the end of the boring bounty hunting? '

It was actually quite profitable that it was a shame to end it.

However, he had to give it up to gain even more compensation.

Ark left the Magic Institute and put some things in order in Giran. The first place he visited was the garrison.

During the period where he destroyed 18 groups of thieves, he did not have time to drop by Giran to receive the bounty money.

“What brings you here?”

“I came to receive the prize money.”

“Do you have the necessary evidence?”

“Yes, of course.”

Tuk, Tuk, Tuk, Tuk

Ark continued to pull out tokens from his bag and piled them on the desk.

After the 3-4, the NPC officials stared with their mouths open until the 10th token. After he finally pulled out all 18 tokens they stared with amazement.

“This is, this is all?”

“Yes, it’s all the tokens. Please confirm it.”

Ark laughed and smiled at the NPC officials as they said.

“It’s amazing. It has been less than a month since I put up most of these bountiesBut all these thieves have been destroyed within a month?”

“Why wouldn’t it?”

“Ah, no. Is there such a thing? ”

After he checked the tokens against a ledger, the NPC handed him a thick money bag.

The bag contained a whopping 254 gold!

He had frantically hunted bandit groups without visiting the village for 9 days.

Of course, he had to practice hunting for five days before the real hunting so the actual investment time was a fortnight. However, excluding the profit from japtem, a 254 gold bounty was a huge income.

In addition, his hunter rank rose to rank C in record time.

However there is a limit to hunting bounties alone.

Ark could catch a lot of thief companies because other users weren't interested in them. Not surprisingly, the phenomenon was limited to some areas.

When a thief company is exterminated and a scheduled time passed then the group would appear again, however the time scheduled for thieves was different from the general monsters.

It was a necessary method to balance the game.

The eighteen cases were only possible for Ark because a large amount of bandit groups settled around a commercial city and the other players generally avoided hunting thief companies. Indeed, when Ark visited the bulletin board there were only three new bounties. Two of them were ones that Ark had cancelled because he didn't have the token.

After Ark collected the bounty, he turned into Giran Square. Sid had also come to the square to organize and sell his japtem. After calculating it in his head, Ark had reserve budget of 1000 gold.

'The gold in reserve could be changed into cash in case of an emergency. Now he didn't have to worry about money after more! '

After he finished counting, he gloatingly asked Sid.

"Now, for the time being I'm stopping bounty hunting. Sid what are you going to do?"

"Arc-nim are you going to Cairo?"

"Yes,"

"So I'll come along"

Sid said with shining eyes.

So even after making him work so much, he still doesn't know Ark's true colours? However, Sid had his own reasons.

"With me? But that is a dangerous place for a merchant"

"I don't have anything to lose anyway."

Sid said with a heart-warming smile.

"And I have to go anyway."

"What is it?"

“Ohuhuhuhu, a windfall. Actually a little while ago I stopped at a store to sell some japtem and I got a quest that was from dedicated professional merchants. The merchant want to study items that are only sold in Cairo. After delivering each special item to the required merchant for research, I would have 150 gold to write off my remaining debt. It seems to be a quest that is only given to merchants with Cairo’s location marked on their map.”

“But you have to be a chaotic user to buy exclusive items from Cairo.....?”

To enter may cost more than 150 gold.
Then Sid grinned and lifted a piece of paper.

“It’s a draft issued by the merchant. But it can’t be used outside of a Cairo store”

That is to say Sid’s only intention was to carry stuff.

“Items that are usually sold in Cairo are difficult to find in an ordinary village. This was more than a little gold. Until now, any money I made went to paying off my debt but not this time. But if I buy the right item then I might be able to resell it for a greater price.”

“Well, that’s fine if you’re sure... ..”

“Yes then please bring me there.”

Sid said while hopping and running.

Frankly, Ark also wanted Sid to come along.

Silently marching for 20 hours a day was possible thanks to Sid. Also, he had a cool character and signed a contract to give Ark his share of the profit from anything he sold. However, Ark had a crucial reason for liking Sid.

As a hobbit, he had access to 6 bags...with the pouch he received from Hanson that was 7 bags available! Sid was just a bag to Ark after all.

‘Cairo is a lawless city. He should have his poisonous skill equipped ready to use at any time. If so, having Sid along would also help. Ayu, my lovely bag. ‘

“Okay.” If it’s Sid then you’re always welcome.

“Then let’s leave immediately!”

Sid swung both of his arms as he walked.

Therefore he continued to travel together with the hobbit merchant with a bad credit rating.

" This was a deposit, ! "

Hyun-woo looked at his bank account with thrilled eyes.

At the end of the Event Quest, he put up the Fire Slayer for auction and the winning bid was just deposited.

In fact, the auction was closed for a while. However, the person who deposited the money received an unavoidable computer error leaving him anxious until it was confirmed that the money was now properly deposited.

The deposit amount was a whopping 11,160,000 won!

The highest bid was 12,000,000 won with 7% going to the auction commission fee. This meant that 840,000 won went to the auction fee but the expense was worth it.

1-1 trade with users could be a popular place for a scam. Hyun-woo also fell victim to a fraud a couple of years ago when trying to buy a 100,000 won item.

A 12,000,000 won item was worth so much more that if he fell victim to a fraud he would vomit blood and die.

'Well, I just have to think of it like a tax and in some cases if you use the auction then you can receive a higher price. I got 11,160,000 won anyway. And the Dark Robe I got yesterday sold for 900,000 won so tomorrow I should receive 870,000 won. '

When combined with the money in his account, he would have around 14,000,000 won.

Every day the prices go up even more but it should be enough to pay two or three months' worth of hospital bills without having to worry about money.

Hyun-woo gave a heart-warming smile at the bank statement.

'Oh, today I have to go to the hospital with uncle Gwon Hwa-rang? '

Hyun-woo remembered the phone call he answered this morning.

"Speaking of Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang, it's been awhile since I've visited his house. Oh that's right, isn't today the day he normally visits his probation members? Because today was the first day they would meet directly since the lump sum came in '

Gwon Hwa-rang had bought a house for the rehabilitation members to live together almost a year ago.

Hyun-woo bought food with a few bills in his pocket while grinding his teeth. He paid for three whole chickens and after dinner drinks.

The total was 55,000 won. Paying 2000 won for seaweed rolls three times a day was an extravagant amount for Hyun-woo.

However, he made an exception for Gwon Hwa-rang and the probation members Spending that much But it was a crowd so he should not scrimp.

Gwon Hwa-rang's place was 30 minutes away by bus.

"Who is it?"

A voice was heard after he pressed the bell.

And the man appeared!

Hyun-Woo used to be a juvenile delinquent and he had a fairly discipline mind and body. However, he became breathless at the sight of the man that appeared.

A bear-like man with tattoos from his wrist to his neck. It was like he found himself in front of a boss monster, with a warning message spontaneously appearing in his head.

The guy scanned him up and down and said.

'What the? You have chicken? "

"Aaa.....I'm here to see Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang?"

"Nag? You know Gwon? "

"Yes, I'm Hyun-woo. We had an appointment today "

"Oh! Oh!"

He scratched his head roughly as his eyes opened in surprise.

"It's you! You're Ark! "

"Yes, that is, yes?"

"Ah! Man why did you hesitate? It's me, number 1405. Remember? "

"Number 1405? Then you are that uncle ... ".

"Yes, Yes! I received a lot of help that day. Well, you do look exactly like your game character. I'm sorry, I don't have very keen eyes. Come in ".

Number 1405 grabbed his arm and just pulled him into the house.

When he unconsciously entered the house, his company immediately raised his voice.

“Hey, Ark is here!”

Not long after,Hyun-woo felt like he had entered a safari park and had been thrown as a toy.

His first impression of all the guys that rushed out of a room was that they were tougher than rock. Frankly, Hyun-woo considered the group of thieves cute compared to these guys. 10 similar men gathered and surrounded him! It was such a situation then he sat down with a sweaty back.

‘Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang says kid, kid.....Looking around where is this kid? ‘

“Gwon had to go out a little bit because of urgent business. He wants you to wait a little bit. It’s like that. And when he goes somewhere he doesn’t bring a cell phone with him.....”

The man with a horrifying knife scar on his face said with a smile. Hyun-woo almost said ‘I’m sorry I’ll buy a cell phone immediately.’

I’m number 1401. Kang Yoo-jin. But did you buy us food?”

Kang Yoo-jin looked at the chicken set in Hyun-woo’s hands.

“Yes,”

After he answered the chicken turned to bone.

It didn’t even take 11 minutes. Scary. Are they going to eat me as well? Did he come for nothing?”

Hyun-woo rolled his eyes nervously. The last of the chicken wings was eaten by number 1405, called Ma Chorung who suddenly asked.

“By the way, have you gone anywhere with Roco?”

“Yes? We only went to a cafe together?”

The group burst into laughter at Hyun-woo’s answer.

“You’re completely a nerd.”

"I'm saying you like her."

"Ohuhuhu. So of course you would have kissed?"

"Aak, Don't say that! I'm just a friend that's a man....uuk!"

"Hey, hey! Don't you know saying that is a crime?"

The conversation broke down with the guys chattering to each other. Hyun-woo who was listening blankly shook his head.

"Well there's nothing between me and Hye-sun. She is just a close younger sibling....."

"What?"

The guys' voices stopped suddenly. They began sending doubtful looks at each other and whispering.

Beside him Kang Yoo-jin blew out a sigh and shook his head.

"Let's stop it at that. I'm embarrassed for everyone. Anyway....Roco is really serious. It's like comparing trees and stone....."

"Yes? Ah, you mean me?"

"No, I have no intention of becoming nosy. Anyway Hyun-woo, no, it is easier to call you Ark. Is that ok? If possible please relax and sit down a little bit more comfortably. This is not a punishment. So why is your form so awkward?"

Hyun-woo then realised that he was sitting on his knees. Hyun-Woo coughed and sat down cross-legged as Yoo-jin smiled and said.

"Please don't be so anxious. Our appearance might be like beasts, but we're not bad guys"

Ma Chorung interrupted with a single word.

"To be frank, we were bad guys."

"I'm not arguing that. "Um, that is clear.

"Then. We don't particularly hate guys like you"

“Yes? Guys like me? ”

“Yes, so you see

Ma Chorung opened his mouth to talk but was prevented by Kang Yoo-jin who said.

“The intention is just like we said. Rather, it was better. In the game, our goals are the same. The new world was more complicated than I thought so if I meet an expert than I’ll ask them about New World.

“Yes, I’m ok with that.”

It was a topic that he knew so Hyun-woo nodded.

Frankly, Hyun-woo’s reaction to the word ex-convict was different from most peoples who would have blinders on.

If they are ex-convicts then they are criminals. It was a cruel and cold-hearted way to think but natural for outgoing people.

So because of these special people, Hyun-wooregarded them with a completely different expression.

However, with such a conversation, his original thoughts disappeared.

In particular, when he was first introduced to number 1401. Kang Yoo-jin seemed like a hard person thanks to his scar but he was more thoughtful than an ordinary person.

The framework is something he disagreed with? He could hear the weight of every behaviour through his voice. The other people were the same as well. Though their outer appearance was tough, when talking about the game their eyes lit up like children.

Hyun-woo felt a sense of surprise at the difference between their appearance and behaviour.

Hyun-woo used the moment to talk seriously with ordinary people who enjoyed the game just as much as he did. After his mind was eased, the conversation became more fun. The difference between how Hyun-woo played the game and how they just enjoyed it was interesting.

“Autonomy from the government?”

Hyun-woo listened to the news about Jackson.

““Yes, it was thanks to Gwon. The condition was he would have to go to the Capital and earn enough points in the arena in front of the nobility. Well, we like it. Because fighting against monsters has been getting boring. ”

Hyun-Woo also meant to see the arena someday. But he never thought the Gwon Hwa-rang would get there first.

It also seemed that the sentence was passed after Hyun-woo had a word with the young Lord.....The strong point of New World was that the words or conduct of a third party could impact it so much that it affects other users. Their common interest led to a more lively conversation.

And Hyun-Woo also joked around and engaged in the conversation.

The skills that they learnt were particularly interesting.

All the unique skills in reality- including violence-could be acquired as their profession. Although they promised to follow the rehabilitation program, that program was not enough to seal off their skills. And New World was a game where they could apply those skills.

“Huhuhu, although the money was initially low in Harun Village, we used our skills to get things cheaper. Therefore, the ‘intimidation’ skill was acquired. You can use the ‘intimidation’ skill at any shop to get items for 10% cheaper! However, it does lower the intimacy with the owners.”

It was the skill that the person called 1402 favoured as a former bond collector. Then number 1406 who was a former pickpocket scoffed.

“Is that something to be proud of? I have the ‘Pickpocket’ skill where I am able to steal one item from a monster in critical condition. That’s better than blackmailing NPCs.”

“Noisy!” Stop talking about the stingy pickpocket skill! Intimidation can also deal with monsters. Do you see how sometimes it flinches? That’s because I intimidated it”

“Huhuhu, that’s trivial. Intimidation? Pickpocket? You have to live a new life but in the end nothing has changed in that cycle. Look at me. The skill ‘Wine Lovers’ gives an extra 20 points to intimacy with female NPCs. Love and Peace? This skill is much better”

“Ha, is the fact that you hit your wife also applied to the game? If you’re like me, the ‘Fraud’ is a much better skill because it allows me to sell items for 15% more even though I’m not a merchant.”

The gentle number 1401, Kang Yoo-jin also spoke up.

‘Ha, New World really has a lot of interesting skills. Even if you have the same profession, depending on the skills you pick it is possible to raise an entirely different character.

It is embodied in the fact that a technique learned in reality is a skill in the game. In reality, some techniques shouldn't transfer over. Some techniques you should feel ashamed about. And again, even if you don't use the technique in the game it is still usable.

We assume the other users' skills are wonderful as well and envy them.

It was one of the reasons people are attracted to New World. And it wasn't possible for Hyun-woo to feel a sense of distance from them anymore.

This is why common interests are so important.

'Oh, that reminds me.....'

Hyun-woo suddenly remembered the new Survival Cooking skill he learnt in Giran. It was a special advanced technique that could create a medley of food with special effects.

Foods that could increase charm, voicewhen cooking it is impossible to guess what effect the dish would have.

But listening to the ex-convicts talk, he thought that the food might be related to certain skill.

The dish to increase charm could be used with the 'wine lovers' skill and the dish to increase the voice could be used with 'Intimidation' to increase the menace in the voice.

Hyun-woo's idea interested the probationary members.

"Ara? There are also items that could give effects like that?"

"Haven't you looked at the auction?"

"The food is stuck because of the expiration date. When it isn't special and the expiration date is short then it is difficult for an auction to sell it. There isn't a special food related category in the auction"

"I see"

"There's a lot of food with unknown effects, it could increase agility or strength but there are also poisonous foods that could give absurd effects."

"Hey, that's fascinating?"

"Well it would be a lot of help when you are a spectator."

"Then I'll make plenty. Fortunately food created with an advanced skill has a longer use by date. By at the moment I have no time to go to the capital thanks to my quest. Is it possible for you to come to Cairo?"

"Cairo?" That's where you're stuck? I've never heard of it?"

"It is very difficult to find the information from other places. It is the lawless city of Cairo.

The ex-convicts eyes shined when they heard the lawless city part.

"A lawless city? Then it is like the Harlem district? Hooo, I certainly have to go there? "

"Ok, before going to the capital we'll try to drop by Cairo."

"So let me explain my approximate location."

"Okay, I understand."

"Huhuhu, it is easy to understand why you're a high level user."

"I give my best regards. Ark."

A probationary member said with a smirk.

After that, Hyun-woo would be different and New World would tremble in time with them.

After 1 hour had passed, Gwon Hwa-rang returned.

Hyun-woo stood up to go to the hospital although he felt regret. A probationary member went with him outside.

"Ark, next time call before you come. We will prepare chicken."

Kang Yoo-jin said, patting Hyun-woo's shoulders.

"And.....If things are difficult then tell us. We might not be the best but we'll stand with you.

If there's anything we can do to support each other than we should. "

"Yes,"

Hyun-woo parted from them without any specific ideas.

So he took a car to the hospital where he met with Gwon Hwa-rang.

"How was the meeting? Did they seem like nice guys? "

"Yes, though I was a little bit scared in the beginning"

"The fact is that I had really wanted you to meet the guys."

"Yes? Why? Which reminds me, didn't Ma Chorong also to say that?"

Gwon Hwa-rang gave a bittersweet smile and muttered.

"Some might have a different view no matter their appearances. Among them he had not wanted to be a criminal. But circumstances were unavoidable and he was forced to live on the streets. And soon was forced to live without a soul and eventually had a criminal record. It is not a good conversation to inquire about the details of their pain. "

""

"Of course, now I don't regret it. I think everyone thinks deeply about how their life might have been different. So you have to think about what you're proud of. Your parentsHum-hum, in difficult circumstances you have to use your own strength to make sure you don't fall on a bad path."

'Is that so? I hope that guy Chorong doesn't hate someone like me in the end. "

Hyun-woo was ashamed for thinking they were a different race from him, even for a short while.

"If they didn't have Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang"

"Anyway. So I can't give up on those guys. Because it is difficult to know how to get out from the wrong bog using your own strength. To be honest, that's why I left today. Many guys would realise it when they look at you struggling to live rightly in a difficult situation. I want to teach that to them through you and New World. Sorry I didn't tell you in advance."

Gwon Hwa-rang spoke as cigarette smoke blew from his mouth out the car window. Hyun-woo looked at the side of Gwon Hwa-rang's face for a while.

That appearance.

It was the face that Hyun-woo had seen when he first met Gwon Hwa-rang.

The mass media portrayed him as a criminal when he used his gun to shoot a violent offender, but he was truly sorry and wanted to help somehow.....It was Gwon Hwa-rang's true power which Hyun-woo respected.

"It's okay." I enjoyed it. And I like the older brothers."

"I'm glad"

"By the wayIs this an operation to introduce me in advance because I might become an adopted son?"

Unsteadily, the car shook for a while.

But Gwon Hwa-rang pretended ignorance and continued smoking.

A secret smile spread on Hyun-woo's mouth as he leaned back in his seat.

On that day, Hyun-Woo gained 10 older ex-convict brothers.

'Does this also increase the level? '

"Is that place Cairo?"

Ark looked at the city's silhouette that was revealed over the ridges.

From the side, Sid muttered about his taste.

"There, so would it be possible to rest soon?"

"Yes, this time I'm going to bath properly."

Ark unfolded the map and nodded.

"It is good news."

Sid collapsed with a thud in that position.

They had arrived at Cairo four days after leaving Giran.

Indeed, it was four days of continuous, fierce hardship.

And the suffering began with Ark's one word.

"In order to save time let's go straight to Cairo."

Although Hansen the cartographer clearly indicated Cairo's location, the map of the surrounding areas was not clear. Finding the proper way to get there from Giran could be time-consuming. Therefore, Ark decided that the quickest way to get to Cairo was to go in the direction with the shortest distance.

.....It was a mistake.

The area between Giran and Cairo was a bit unclear.

There was a dense jungle where the exit wasn't visible.

He didn't expect the high level hunting ground infested with strange monsters over level 100.

With the darkness bonus applied at night, he could somehow deal with the monsters but during the day this did not apply. In addition, there were gaping crevasses in places like the valley floor and a swamp that was like a maze, making it easy to get lost. It was a miracle that they had managed to escape the jungle alive.

Sid looked at Ark with sunken eyes.

'Fortunately, they had found some ruins hidden in the jungle, and raise their intimacy with an NPC from the Migu Migu Clan.....without him, I'd be dead.'

The situation had become more difficult thanks Ark's character which he stuck fearfully to!

The difficult situation meant that Ark didn't sleep for more than 2 hours a day. Thanks to that, even Sid was dragged out. In addition, restless creatures chasing you can also increase tension. Of course the tremendous fatigue and lack of sleep decreased their health until they fell into a critical state.

I'd rather be dead, how many times had he thought that?

He entered the jungle straight away after Giran. Of course the final resurrection place was Giran..... He could use dying in the jungle as an excuse to rest in Giran but.....

He noticed that when Ark fought in battles, he always protected Sid. Of course, even Sid knew that it wasn't a statement of the friendship. It would be difficult to collect a lot of japtem with 6 bags gone.

After that, the two of them who had passed such a hell eventually reached Kairote. Just looking at the distant Cairo caused tears to rise.

'You did it, Sid! You did! Great job, Sid! You're cool, Sid!'

"What happened?"

"Oh, no. Dust just entered my eye....."

Sid wiped his blurry eyes with his sleeves.

"Now, let's go. We need to organize our stuff and get some rest."

"Yes!"

At the end of his words, Sid let out a wide grin and nodded.

The two of them soon went up along the ridges.

Cairo was located on top of the ridge, just like the city of Machu Picchu shown in a documentary. The size of the silhouette shown in the dim moonlight was roughly the size of the Jackson manor.

Growing vine the ground was thick vines that surrounded the city like a wall.

Unless displayed on the map, Cairo was difficult to find due to the thick vines making it seem like a forest.

Cairo's entrance was guarded by NPCs.

Unlike other cities, these guards were dressed like bandits.

Ark and Sid gazed at the magical sight of the vines surrounding them as they reached the entrance. The guards frowned darkly and interrupted them.

"Wait! What, you guys?"

"Yes? Did you just enter the city?"

"Bah! Go out! This isn't a place where every youngster can enter! "

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you hear me say leave?"

"If you make me say it again, I'm going to show you how to walk away with a bitter taste!

The guard NPCs roughly pushed them together.

It was a tense atmosphere. They couldn't cause problems with the NPCs as soon as they reached Cairo. Eventually Ark and Sid left with puzzled faces.

"Why are they doing this? The NPC stops users from even entering the town? "

Of course, sometimes there are guards that press users at general villages. However, it is applicable only to the chaotic user. As he was thinking, Ark realised that he forgot something.

"Ah, this was a city for chaotic users!"

"Oh, right. I had heard that only chaotic players could enter Cairo."

Sid seemed to have the same thought as he stated in a frustrated voice.

“What do we do? We came so far.....”

“It’s not that way”

A shallow smile spread on Ark’s face.

‘Huhuhu, I had collected something a while ago and forgot about it.....I didn’t think it would be used for this. Of course I made sure to collect it even when its purpose was unclear. Because you don’t know when or where you’ll need it. ”

“Snake, [Lie] scroll!”

Snake spat out the red scroll.

After Sid checked the scroll his eyes widened and he raised his voice.

“Eh? That, that is! ”

“I had taken away the scroll from Leo previously.”

Ark said with a smile. In fact, it was an item that every time his bags ran out of space he thought about selling. However, trying to sell the special item he got after all that hard work was uncomfortablewhat a relief.

“Now, where to use it once?”

Ark used the scroll to edit his character info.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good+200	
Fame	1635	Level	90
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson’s Hero	
Health	1745	Mana	1355 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	234 (+ 5)
Agility	264 (+ 17)	Stamina	334
Wisdom	33	Intelligence	262
Luck	44	Flexibility	26
Art of Communication	23	Affection	55 (+ 10)

Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics 53

Equipment item effects

Black Bear Mouse Leather Armour: Agility + 2, Frost Resistance + 20
Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%
Crystal Golem's Head: Mana + 100
Norad Boots: movement speed + 10%, avoidance rate + 5%
Adelaine's Necklace: Def + 40, Affection + 10
Resurrecting Spirit: Strength + 5, Mana Recovery + 5%

* All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (15 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

{Lie} scroll, using this scroll, the player's level and alignment, and one stat can be randomly controlled. However, the level and state must extend beyond 10 up or down.{Duration: 1 hour}

"Level increase by 10, alignment chaotic."

Ark's current level had increased to 90 after 3 days in the forest. The Lie scroll adjusted it upwards to level 100. And he became a chaotic player and his name was turned red. With other users walking back and forth, it was difficult to raise his level.

It was the reason he deliberately chose night time.

"Now there's only one of this scroll"

"What about me.....?"

"I'll enter Cairo and buy lots of scrolls. I'll also gather information if I can. And Sid will lurk where appropriate. Don't be recognized as something else by a chaotic user or you'll be in danger."

"Then I'll do that. Please. "

Reassured, Sid nodded.

Ark gave a faint smile.

"I'll take out the price of the scroll from the japtem charges."

After trusting the wrong person, the Sid who went all the way to Cairo to find a way to live should elicit sympathy, but that was non-existent in Ark. Of course, it was that guy.

Sid pasted a strange smile on his face and nodded.

"Yes, ha ha! Of course."

"Then, I'm going. Be very good at hiding and take care of yourself. "

Ark looked at Sid like he was a body with 6 bags again. As expected, after he reached the entrance and his name was shown the attitude of the NPCs changed.

"Ara? You're the guy from a little while ago? "

"Well?" Yes....."

After scanning up and down, the NPC laughed wildly.

"Kukuku, the fragrant smell of blood is emanating from your body. Meanwhile where is your young friend?"

"Around. That hobbit, was visibly appetizing....But are you done?" Huhuhu, you're a bad guy who betrayed the guy who accompanied you here. But I much prefer the hypocrisy over the good guy guise. And this place is not a paradise for the faithful. Ok, if you have thrown off the mask of hypocrisy then you are welcome. "

His intimacy with the guard quickly rose.

Ark wanted to use the chance to gain additional information.

"Perhaps, did a redheaded man come here?"

"A redheaded man? Hmm, let's see? It is a difficult question to answer. This is a place where hundreds of people come in and out in one day. And most would be wearing a hat."

"Then has anything strange happened in the last few days....."

"There's no such thing? Well, the lawless city is always a problem, but there wasn't anything that was particularly strange. Although these days the vines that protect the city have withered a little bit, but that's all. Did you want to know something like that?"

"Indeed. I understand."

"Let me know anytime you need help, I'll give it to you."

"I'll only give it to you. A foreigner has to protect his life."

The NPC guards chuckled and said.

Ark ignored them and entered Cairo.

He couldn't feel secure in the city. Cairo was a lawless city. There were guard NPCs, but here if a fight broke out between the users then the NPC would not pay attention. They maintain minimal security. The NPC only acts when Cairo is attacked.

It is the 'crime promotion' area.

Of course, if they kept fighting then every chaotic user would be mentally and physically tired. Therefore, to some extent there were tacit rules. But that had nothing to do with the Ark who just stepped into Cairo.

Of coursethere was flashing here and there as he walked along a wide road.

The chaotic users hiding in the alley here and there used [Insight] to confirm Ark's level. In addition, some users also applied for a party. The purpose of this wasn't to form a party, but was to determine if Ark could be a colleague.

"Sheesh, it's a high level."

"He's also in a party. If I touch him, it'd be tiring."

"A novice should have entered so we could educate them a little bit."

Now the users who were gawking from a nearby alley stealthily withdrew.

Due to New World's system, it was less likely for chaotic players to be high level.

It took a colossal amount of time and money to get rid of the chaotic status, and the loss would be too big if they died.

At a low level, gaining a chaotic status to steal had a low risk rate and benefits, but as the level increases that risk would increase exponentially.

Because of that, the users in Cairo were mainly level 30-40. They wouldn't dare attack Ark who had become level 100 thanks to the [Lie] scroll.

'The first checkpoint has been passed.'

Ark was finally able to relax and find a shopping centre.

In Cairo it wasn't only the outer walls, the exteriors of every building was also enveloped in vines. Thankfully, the buildings were not like other cities and had distorted shapes. In addition, the city was fairly complex and it as difficult to find his way. How far did he walk? Ark had finally discovered a strange place.

In the central part of the city, there was a wide gaping hole with a diameter of about 10 meters.

Access beware!A long time ago during the warring States period, the monarch who had ruled for 1 year ordered that the hole be built. At that time, the 1 year ruler

swore to fill the hole with the invaders' bodies. It was thus named 'hell.' But soon afterwards the war ended and the vow was not fulfilled. At the time, there was no documentation about how deep the hole was. However, the deep fury of the 1 year monarch was estimated to reach several hundred meters. If you fall then there is a 100% chance of death. Only those who want to commit suicide are allowed to dive

It is the corpse disposal arena in the centre of the city

The history was as bloody as expected, appropriate for a lawless city.

'Ah, this is not the time.'

Ark who was watching the hole with his mouth open, turned his head away. If possible, he wanted to explore Cairo some more so now was not the time. He was also worried about Sid waiting outside and the [Lie] scroll also had a time limit. His top priority was to quickly locate a shopping centre. Ark had been running down a back alley to quickly look for a shopping centre. However moments before stepping foot in a mall, he realised that there was something wrong.

'This, this Which reminds me, isn't it night-time?'

Even the mistake was tight.

Ark had chosen night time to enter Cairo because he received the dark attribute bonus. But he hadn't considered the original purpose. In New World, NPCs also close their shops during the evening to sleep. And now, of course, all the stores were closed because it was night.

'Damn! In New World, it was now dawn which arrives at 5am. The stores open at 8 a.m. so he has to wait 3 more hours?'

The duration of his scroll was limited.

Would the duration end before the store's doors open?

It's obvious that he would get attacked by NPC guards if they saw him.

But was that all? When a guard NPC shows up, other chaotic users would also enter! If he uses 'Stealth' then it is possible to escape but without the scroll he won't be able to buy items from the store, and he also wouldn't be able to collect information about the red man.

'In the end, I came here only to end up sucking fingers.'

Of course, he could become chaotic but he wanted to avoid that as much as possible.

Once you become chaotic then the alignment and fame is reduced by 30%. But it doesn't stop there? At level 90, to lose the chaotic status he must surrender to the guards and be locked up in prison for 9 days in real time and a fine of 90 gold. It was certainly a reckless penalty!

'No! There must be another way?'

Ark desperately ran around the shopping centres.
That's when he found his light of salvation in the form of a store.
A dim light shone from a small grocery store nestled in a small alley. The doors were closed but it was possible that the NPC was still inside?
Tapping at the door, Ark jumped up and shouted.

"Are you here?"

"At this time, what kind of child are you?"

"Oh, I'm fortunate that you're here. I have to buy some stuff. "

"We're closed. Because it's troublesome, go away! "

"There is an urgent situation. Please open the door as a small favour! "

"I told you I won't trade!"

However, Ark believed this store was his open option.
He did not stop knocking until the door eventually flew open and a furious man's face emerged.

"Leave me alone! You don't have to go crazy just before daylight!"

"I'm really sorry. I told you it was a really urgent matter. Please give me a moment to buy a few things. It will only take a short time. Please."

Ark lowered his head and begged and the man's face slightly softened. He scratched his head and blew out a sigh before shaking his head.

"Look I don't like to say no to someone desperate. Of course, I would like to engage in the business of a businessman too. But this matter is also not about you. I also can't afford your patronage. Even though I want to I can't.

"Yes? Can't afford to patronize? What does that mean? "

“Come on, get inside the store. Because of this, do you understand?”

The shop owner indicated with an irritated expression.

The inside of the store was a mess. The shelves and miscellaneous items were smashed and the walls and floors had broken items all over the place. Just looking at the situation, he could tell that there was a serious problem.

“Can I help with anything?”

“What?” What did you say?”

“I asked if you needed any help”

Ark who was used to being friendly with NPCs automatically answered.

If someone is good, then they may receive thanks. Because there was never any loss, the system had become ingrained as a habit.

Then the shop owner looked at him with a befuddled look.

“Why would you do that? Was it a mistake...? ”

“Ah, no.

The shop owner was surprised as he shook his head.

“It’s because I haven’t heard those words in so long. Also you’re a foreigner? The foreigners who often shop here don’t bother with anyone else’s’ problems. Of course, most of the murders are committed by criminals.....”

‘Oh, which reminds me of something in Cairo?’

Chaotic players don’t bother building intimacy with quest NPCs. That was not the main concern of chaotic players.

Their main concern and interest is how many users they can PK and gain items before losing the chaotic status. Therefore, none of them would have had any interest in the NPC’s circumstances.

Ark immediately grasped the situation and answered.

“It is difficult to tell the difference in this place, but I am not like them. Also I have never done anything that I was ashamed about. It was because of circumstances that couldn’t be avoided that a crime was committed. And after my business here ends then I will surrender and be judged in a legitimate court of law.”

Ark was heartfelt (?) Needless to say, the shop owner nodded.

"No, I understand. There would often be such a friend."

"Now would it be okay to explain the situation to me? I was thinking that solving other peoples' difficulties was my fate. I have the body of a criminal now but isn't it possible to see past that just this once."

"Whew, but".

The shop owner was worried about something and talked seriously.

"Just by looking you can understand, but a thief entered the store last night."

"The thief?"

"Yes, in fact, this is not the first time. Surprisingly, just this shop has been visited at least three times in the last fortnight. Replacing the lock was ineffective. They don't steal anything but I would rather they did. Every time they visit they would destroy the shop. Now I'm tired of it. Until now, I've somehow tried to hold on butNow I've already given up. AnywayNo, I know how to clean up the store and leave this place. "

"Aren't there any guards here? Didn't you tell them? "

Ark tilted his head to one side.

Users don't involve guard NPCs with their problems, but the shop owner was a NPC. The NPC didn't try to engage their help? If they have no restraint, then it is possible for chaotic users to do those kinds of things when dealing with the store.

"That,Hung, it was a whole bunch of nonsense. This is my problem I don't need other people's help. All right, now anyway? Because I can't engage in business, please forget it and leave."

"Ha, but"

"Now!"

The shop owner suddenly changed. And stepped closer to Ark and looked suspiciously into Ark's eyes.

"Now, you're really.....?"

"Yes?"

"This, unbelievable! The scent of blood has disappeared from your body? Then surely the [Lie]! "

' Whoops! '

Ark's heart suddenly fell.

The duration of the scroll had finished because he was delayed running around Cairo. And in front of an NPC. In Cairo, even the NPC was chaotic.

It was similar to thieves in Giran being tired of the hunt.

If the shop owner let the NPC guard know then he was screwed.

However, you also can't kill the NPC. If he became wanted as a NPC killer in Cairo then he would have to give up the quest from the Magic Institute.

"I, I....."

Ark was embarrassed and tried to diffuse the situation somehow.

Suddenly, the shop owner grabbed Ark's arm. He closed the door and observed outside from a small side door. After confirming that there was no one around, the shop owner blew out a sigh of relief.

"That was close. I was wondering if someone had noticed ... "

"You're not accusing me?"

"Accuse? Huhuhu, great. What is good about deliberately plotting against you? In addition, you must have a reason to use a scroll to come here."

"Thank you,"

The shop owner looked at Ark as he decided something and opened his mouth.

"It is difficult to say, but perhaps you'll give me some help?"

"Of course I would like to help. But just before..... "

"It's a matter that I didn't want to ask of a criminal. But if you're not a criminal then the circumstances are different. And if you managed to visit here through your own power then you must have considerable skills, enough that I might be able to give you a favour.

Ark eyes shone brightly.

A NPC quest! The quest was one that could only be given if a non-chaotic player came to Kairote. It was a development that couldn't be imagined.

"As a matter of fact. I know the criminal who entered the store. If you exit the town and climb the south hill there is an unemployed bum called Lorenzo who lives at the cabin."

The shop owner said.

'If you punish him severely and recover the stolen goods, then you'll be properly compensated. That's it for now....but I'll tell you what? If you recover any items, then I'll offer a 40% discount on the price. Anyway, I am going to put everything in order as I leave so I should probably reduce the baggage. How is it?"

'Ohu!'

In Ark's eyes gold powder fell.

He didn't know how much stuff had been stolen, but since it had been stolen five times then it wouldn't be a small amount. Of course if he sold the items he received with a 40% discount at another city then he could get considerable profit.

Sid had also come to Cairo with that purpose.

"Are there any other gangs?"

"No, as far as I know he lives by himself."

"Good! But before that ...You see that I urgently need the [Lie] scroll. Is it possible to save me in regards to that?"

"Don't worry. I always have a few [Lie] scrolls.

The shop owner pulled out three protruded scrolls.

"Thank you. So I will immediately go and recover your things."

"Now, wait a minute"

At that time, the shop owner hurriedly grabbed Ark's hands.

"Don't misunderstand. I'd love to punish him a little. But nothing beyond that."

"Yes? But what...? "

“No, I mean Anyway the thing is stealing is scandalous but it did not harm me directly. If he dies due to somebody I sent then how can I calm down? I just want my things returned. So just keep that in mind. Under no circumstances should you kill him. Understood? If you do not keep the promise I won’t forgive you”

“.....I understand.”

Although he didn’t understand the shop owner’s attitude, Ark nodded. As soon as he did, the quest window popped up.

The worries of shop owner Wolkosu You have met the shop owner Wolkosu in Cairo. He has angrily continued to put up with a thief who ruined his store for a fortnight. Unlike the other foreigners in Cairo, he has asked just you to solve this case. You have to punish the thief and recover the goods. {However, if the rogue is injured with a sword then the quest will automatically fail. If the quest is not finished by the end of the month, a vindictive Wolkosu will believe you did not keep the promise and file a complaint to the NPC} Difficulty level: E

Act 7 : Dark Brother

‘Here?’

20 minutes after he left Cairo and walked up the hill, a cabin appeared.

He used ‘Stealth’ to observe through a window.

As expected, the NPC named Lorenzo was chaotic. Level 80. Although it was a high level for other people, he couldn’t compare to Ark who was level 90 and receives a bonus attribute in the dark. Quest difficulty E.

It took 90 levels to perform one difficulty up.

However, it wasn’t a simple quest where he could rush in blindly.

It usually required killing the target to receive a key that would open a warehouse and retrieve the goods. However, he couldn’t kill Lorenzo and he couldn’t even use a sword. In other words, he had to find out the whereabouts of the goods first.

‘I had previously encountered thieves in the ruins..... ‘

After surveying the structure of the cabin, Ark said to Sid.

“As expected, there is a back entrance. If one is backed into a corner they may escape through the back entrance. Therefore Sid will block the back door. If blocked by a body on the outside then there is no particular danger.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Sid answered in a tense voice and went back.

‘Now, this fellow recently held poison.’

If you block the escape of a level 80 NPC then they would have nothing to build a strategy. Intimidating for the time being and if that doesn’t work then a little bit of violence is okay.

Ark immediately kicked the door and entered the cabin. Lorenzo who was surprised, tried to stand up.

“You, who are you?”

“I will not speak for long. Where are you hiding the stolen goods? ”

“The stolen goods? What are you talking about? ”

“It is useless to feign ignorance. I already know. Just tell me obediently before you get hurt.”

“What, what?” Thief? Who said such a silly thing?”

“Who is it? -Wolkosu. Wouldn’t you know who Wolkosu is even if I didn’t explain it?

It was at that time. At the mention of Wolkosu, Lorenzo’s forehead violently twitched. Then his eyes anxiously shook as he sighed.

“Wolkosu…….!”

Lorenzo ground his molars together and growled.

“I don’t know what inspired such nonsense but I didn’t steal anything! Go back! If you don’t return then I’ll beat you to death.

“Oh, a beating to death?

Ark laughed and nodded his head.

“That’s the most welcome sound I ever head. Let’s see if you can give it a try. ”

“This child!”

Lorenzo kicked the chair and rushed at him.

He tried to use the distraction of the chair to attack. It was a familiar method that other thieves used to fight. However for juvenile delinquents who walked a dark road, it was a method that Ark was tired of. That much was not enough to give an element of surprise. Ark caught the chair and kicked sideways. The next moment his fist shot out in rapid succession in a flash. Ark’s specialty was continuous critical hits!

“Kuooooak!”

He delivered blows to the chest, waist and side, after being hit with three critical attacks Lorenzo moaned and withdrew.

Although Ark did not use his sword for attack and defense at the same time he did have his gloves, the Cat Paws. Due to the growth system of the Cat Paws, his offensive power was currently 9~15 (+8.9)

In some ways, it was better than a sword. In addition, Ark had also learned Sword-Hand Combat and Hand-to-Hand Combat, so he had no reason to be penalized by the absence of a sword.

Lorenzo's health was quickly reduced to 30%.

“Ugh, this, unbelievable!”

Lorenzo ground his teeth together and rushed again.

“Ha ha ha, copper!”

But once Dedric and Skull joined the fight, Lorenzo immediately retreated to the corner again. Ark continuously rained punches and kicks on him!

Lorenzo soon developed bruises all over his body. And finally he turned and a punch hit his temple, sending him flying through to the other side of the wall.

“Now, little by little did you want to confess?”

“Damn it, no way!”

“I see you want to lose your soul.”

Ark drew back his fist and directed it to Lorenzo's face, which instantly turned pale.

Lorenzo had already lost 70% of his health. While Ark only lost 10% at most. In the first place, he was fighting in a game. Finally, Lorenzo threw a water bottle and turned his body around.

He tried to open the back door butLorenzo's face became perplexed. Sid had already blocked the other side of the door so it was stuck and wouldn't open.

“What, what the?” What the hell is this? ”

“Hu hu hu, What a fool! Did he think I wouldn't have any countermeasures?”

“Rain, eat this!

Lorenzo lifted the sword hanging on the wall beside him. However, Ark moved much faster than him.

Pok!

Ark kicked Lorenzo's stomach.

Without any mistakes, he accurately hit a vital spot on the underbelly and gained a critical hit!

Lorenzo was stunned and fell back.

Ark who was waiting for the chance immediately shouted.

“Snake, tie him up!”

Saek saek!

Snake flicked his tongue and firmly tied up both of Lorenzo’s arms. Thus, the fight with Lorenzo was easily settled with that.

With one step, Ark approached the struggling Lorenzo and asked.

“Okay, now where should your excrement and the popular soybean paste go? Just as it is in your mouth? Or will you confess? For your information, I wouldn’t mind beating you up some more.”

“Dammit, I told you from the beginning! I did not steal it!”

“Don’t make me laugh. So without any evidence you have been accused as a thief? If you did something suspicious then obviously you would be considered a criminal! ”

“Sheesh, what do you know? That old man didn’t know what he was talking about! ”

“Even if you die, you’re not going to confess?”

“There’s nothing to confess!”

“Not possible”

Ark’s eyes became chilly.

Dedric looked at Lorenzo and clicked his tongue.

“Tsk ts, poor guy, he just dug his own grave.”

Dedric knew from experience what would happen when Ark looked like that.

As expected.....When Lorenzo’s health recovered a little bit, Ark showed his true colours. In the past, Dedric was tamed using the same method as he stepped on Lorenzo. With a stupid face, Lorenzo freaked out about the kicks and let out a cry of distress.

“Keuak! This bastard! What are you doing! ”

However, Ark didn’t even blink.

In the past, the only way to tame someone rude was with a whip!

Additionally, Ark’s character was that once he starts something, he sees it through to the end.

Ark continued stepping on Lorenzo's face until he was in a critical condition. Then he waited awhile for health to recover, stepped and wait, how many times did he repeat it.....

"Ark-nim, you done yet.....Huk!"

Sid stuck his head through the back door and screamed.

New World was a virtual reality game where a sense of realism overflows.

Not even 10 minutes had passed since Ark refused to let the violently beaten Lorenzo die and it looked like a violent scene from an 18+ rated movie.

"Oh, Ark-nim. Isn't this too severe?"

"Hell no. I haven't even started yet."

Ark answered with a grin and Sid's face turned white in terror.

However, Lorenzo did not submit.

Rather, the more violent Ark became then the more profanities escaped from his mouth.

"Dwe, eat this! Just kill me already!"

"Hehehe, Master. Then how about an extreme method?"

At that time, the cunning fellow Dedric treacherously smiled and approached. A cold smile spread at the corners of Ark's mouth.

"Hmm, well that's okay? As expected you have a bad side as well."

"Huhuhu, this is due to master's virtue."

Dedric chattered.

.....Was that praise, or an insult?

Anyway, Ark listened to Dedric's advice and stopped the violence. Instead, he placed a pot and ingredients on the table and began survival cooking.

After a while, the sweet smell of food filled the room.

"Eek? No, what are you doing? Stop it! "

Ark held Lorenzo's jaw wide open and poured food into his mouth. Lorenzo collapsed to the ground screaming and began to spasm.

'Fragrant Poison Soup ' which activated the paralysis effect.

"You.....This, you bastard! Such.....a thing....."

Lorenzo sweated and stuttered with a paralyzed tongue. It was a soup with a terrible taste and next Ark fed him the horrible salad, waste-flavoured jello etc. But that was only the beginning.

The true horror was the spicy seafood chowder medley.

Using the medley skill, there was a low probability of terrible food being produced.

And the taste was so 'shocking' that neither the taste nor effect could be compared with a general survival cooking dish. As it did not decrease the health at all, it was possible to annoy all five senses to the limit

It was closer to being a biological weapon than a food.

The medley of chowder was made in such great numbers that just the sight was enough to make him tremble in fear. And the devil-like food entered Lorenzo's mouth immediately.

Every time he ate it, Lorenzo jumped and spasmed like a fish.

A new concept of using food to torture!

"Ugh, I can't bear to watch!"

Dedric turned his head away with a horror-stricken face.

To Sid who hadn't experienced the horrors of the food, it seemed like a joke but.....

"Stop! Please help me! I will say, I'll talk, please I'll speak! I'll do anything as long as you stop it with the food!"

After he cooked the fifth food, Lorenzo screamed and surrendered.

It was the inevitable result. Just eating the food caused such a threat to his life that Ark developed the Indomitable Body skill, and to Dedric it was so horrifying that he developed speech in order to stop eating the food.

It reached a level that humans would not be able to eat.

Ark stopped the hand motions for cooking and grinned.

"So, I'm glad that you stopped fighting."

"Now, cruel bastard.....How could someone in the guise of a human make such horrible food.....!"

'What?

"Oh, no! No, no!"

"Well, that's it. Then let's get to the main subject. Where's the stuff?"

"I'll say it again I didn't steal anything!"

"Ah, is that so? Are you still hungry?"

Ark picked up the pot of food and Lorenzo immediately cried out in a wronged voice.

"And please wait! Really. I really didn't. But I can guess the fellows who stole it. It's that guy.

"Aren't you prevaricating?"

“Please believe me. The fact is that I was also a victim. They robbed the General Store and now they’re trying to frame me for it. ”

“Ah, Ark-nim” Try not to believe his words.”

Sid noticed his face and interrupted.

“But the context fits. Why would stealing things from the General Store be a problem for you? ”

“That’s actually”

Lorenzo hesitated to answer Ark but eventually desperately replied.

“I’m actually...Wolkosu’s adopted son.”

“What?” Adopted son?”

After Lorenzo lost his parents when he was young, he lived with his uncle who managed a store in Selebrid who entrusted him to Wolkosu.

Wolkosu was not friendly in nature.

Lorenzo worked the difficult night to dawn shift and if he made a little mistake then he would be punished.

Lorenzo decided that he would become a runaway.

He began living on the streets for several years and Lorenzo became a full fledge delinquent.

Then one day, Lorenzo was caught in another gang’s dispute and accidentally killed a man. So Lorenzo became chaotic and was pursued by guards before he managed to hide to reach Wolkosu in Selebrid.

He was going to threaten Wolkosu to give him some escape funds.

However, when he was listening at the store, he overheard the cashier say something amazing.

Wolkosu asked about the people trying to extort money from Lorenzo and paid them back one by one in a month. And the fact that Lorenzo wasn’t caught by the guards during that month was also due to Wolkosu.

“I never knew. My fatherHe was clumsy at expressing affection. I didn’t understand that I was loved. If I knew earlier I wouldn’t have done such stupid things ”

Lorenzo said with a slightly shaky voice.

Lorenzo shrugged his shoulders and left the store.

With help, he barely managed to avoid the bounty hunters and guards and came to Cairo. He built a cabin outside Cairo to live in and swore to no longer do any bad things. And it was long after that he came.

“Although I forgot for a whileMy dad suddenly opened a store in Cairo. My father had never committed a crime. He obviously used the [Lie] scroll to disguise himself as a criminal and conduct business.

Lorenzo ground his teeth tightly.

Wolkosu had many reasons to set up a shop in Cairo. Of coursethe main one was Lorenzo.

Lorenzo wept after he realised Wolkosu’s heart. However, once the relationship was twisted it did not come loose easily. While thinking about how hard that month must have been on Wolkosu, he didn’t even dare beg forgiveness.

“I stayed here so I wouldn’t both my father. Once when he was free he visited the store and violence occurred. I was told to get lost.....Although I wanted to beg for forgiveness.....I couldn’t bear it. After hurting him for over 10 years, was it even possible to be forgiven? I.....thought it was best for my father to abandon me. Perhaps that’s why my father thought I stole things. ”

“Then who stole the stuff?”

“They are subordinates of the older brother I followed in the past.”

“What?” The older brother’s subordinates? ”

“Yes, I left the organization before I realised my mistake and came here. However, they pursued me to Cairo a while ago. They wanted me to work for a large robbery group. Of course I refused. Then the guys said that they wouldn’t leave my father alone if I didn’t listen.

From that, Ark found all the answers to his questions.

The reason the shop owner Wolkosu had a large order of the [Lie] scroll. It was for his own use.

It was also the reason why Ark received the quest after he became non-chaotic. Because the shop owner did not trust criminals. It also explained why he did not report to the NPC guard and why he warned him not to harm Lorenzo.....it wasn’t necessary to speak.

‘It was really a third-rate drama scenario’

In the end, the main culprit was the boss of the group of thieves. When he thought about it anger surged immediately.

“Hukhukhuk, it was like that. I understand. He is like a father, although I can’t really understand.”

Sid had become too immersed and a tear slid down his face as he spoke.
Although not to the same degree, Ark also felt uncomfortable.
After Ark met the ex-convicts, his views had changed.
People in unavoidable circumstances can walk down a path of darkness. They also have their own drama. He shouldn't blindly judge them for their crimes.
Lorenzo also made an effort to put his life of crime behind him and live a new life.
Although he was once a delinquent, if his older brother had listened then shouldn't he have celebrated his new start? Instead, he decided to threaten Lorenzo's father?
Even among NPCs, there are dirty and lousy guys.
Although not clearly shown, everything that exists in reality also exists in the game.

"Actually, I heard that after they chased me to Cairo they robbed the general store several times, including last night. If I don't answer within a week then I don't know what they'll do to my father to threaten me. If that fellow..... "

Lorenzo ground his back teeth together.

"So? What should be done? "

"I can't stand it anymore."

"Let's catch them and beat them up?"

"That's not the only way."

At that time, Sid asked in a worried voice.

"But what if they have a lot of guys?"

"Heh, it'll happen anyway because of me. I must live in order to negotiate."

"Okay." Snake, untie."

Ark placed Snake back around his waist.

"Come on, if we're decided then it's better to finish this quickly."

"What?" You surely? "

Ark said in a blunt voice.

"It's not guaranteed that you're telling the truth. You might just flee. So I have to follow and confirm whether you're telling the truth or not. And I also promised the shop owner that I could recover his things, so I can't just leave it in the hands of the criminals. "

"Ah, Ark-nim!"

Sid shouted with a thrilled face. Lorenzo also looked at him with incredulous eyes.

‘Please do not look like that with red cheeks. Because there was no possibility of him returning with the quest unsolved.’

On the other hand, Dedric muttered with a nasty look at Ark.

“Sheesh, there he goes again. Master’s acting again.....”

Lorenzo looked at Ark for a while before clenching his teeth.

“To say thank you ...I don’t want to”

“It isn’t necessary. I’m not helping for free”

It was at that time. Dududung, the quest information window popped up.

Quest has been updated. Shop owner Wolkosu’s distress= Clear Lorenzo’s name
You discovered that Lorenzo was the shop owner Wolkosu’s adopted son.
The events that occurred in the last fortnight at the General store are the work of his old companions trying to involve him in a bandit group. Accompany Lorenzo to the hideaway, determine if it is the truth or a lie and recover the stolen goods (Warning, if Lorenzo dies on the way then the quest will fail).

Difficulty level: D

‘I found the correct shape’

Ark grinned and laughed.
Suddenly, there was an unexpected message.

-Andel used a [Feather of whispering] to whisper.

‘What the? Andel?’

Ark had a bewildered expression.
Although he had forgotten about him for a while, Ark never thought that Andel would attempt to whisper him. After contemplating for a bit, he shook his head.
If he authorized the whisper, it was easy enough to imagine the contents. In the end, he had a nasty feeling. In addition, he did not want to engage in a fight with Andel at the moment.

“Refuse whisper”

Ark lightly ignored the whisper.
At that time, Ark did not realise one simple thing.
A whisper can only reach people in the same area.

“I’ve found him. Ark! ”

A hazy smile spread at Andel’s mouth.

He had accompanied the assassins dispatched by the Assassin’s guild for the last fortnight. After Andel joined the assassins in Selebrid, they immediately left for Giran. Ark received the Event Quest from the Magic Institute, so he reasoned that Ark would have to return to Giran. But by that time Ark had already joined Sid so there was no reason for him to keep returning to Giran.

Thanks to that, Andel and the assassins never discovered Ark’s whereabouts. After that, the only plan Andel could come up with after wandering around Giran was to use the [Feather of Whispering].

But it was only possible to whisper within a certain range. In other words, it doesn’t matter if the opponent refuses the whisper, as long as the [Feather of Whispering] worked than if was proof that he wasn’t far from Ark.

And once he entered the vicinity of Cairo, the [Feather of Whispering] immediately worked.

“That guy is somewhere around here.”

At Andel’s words, the three assassins dispatched by the Dark Brother nodded.

“There aren’t a lot of villages in Brandt Mountains. There are many places he could be.”

“OK, then let’s keep a certain distance and move using [Trace].

The assassins scattered with the scroll.

[Trace] was a scroll that can determine the location of the target if they were within a 1km radius.

Once the vicinity was confirmed, then locating Ark would only be a matter of time using the scroll.

‘Ark, it’s the end for you!’

Flames of vengeance burned in Andel’s eyes.

‘He touched the wrong person? No matter what, I’ll return the favour. If I can’t pass the company examination then you won’t be able to either. I’ll catch you’re ankle and pull you down with me. No, even if I have to spend millions of won, I’ll connect to New World again! You poor sod!’

"How many people would there be?"

"It would be six or seven people."

Lorenzo replied in a tense voice.

After leaving Sid at the cabin, Ark and Lorenzo returned to Cairo.

The hideout of the thieves threatening Lorenzo was located deep in the alleys of Cairo. Although Lorenzo believed there were only six or seven people, the building size made it capable of hiding at least 20.

"I feel like the quest is becoming even longer.....Well, it's not that bad."

The thieves are all inferior to Lorenzo.

Lorenzo was a level 80 rogue, while the others were down around level 60~70. If you compared them to Ark who was 20 levels higher and had fought thieves in Giran, then it shouldn't be that difficult. He thought that the quest would probably be solved in 10 minutes.

'Once the quest is complete then I can start my get rich quick scheme.'

The General Store had been robbed three times.

If so, there were quite a lot of items stolen. He could purchase all the items at 40% off the original price.

Ark currently had 1000 gold. The Nurunma leaves were also expected to add a large amount so he should have around 1,600 gold. Once the quest was solved, Ark would invest his money in purchasing items.

'They could fill Sid's bags with all the items and leave.... '

In the case of a general item that isn't a special commodity, a store would buy it for 50% of its purchase price.

However, he could sell it for 80% of its price to users who need the item. And when it is an item that couldn't be obtained from a local store, it is possible to add more value and sell it at 120% of its purchase price.

Using simple maths, if he have 1000 gold and I buy items for 60% and sell it at 120% then there would be a profit of 600 gold.

Some conditions to receive quests could be difficult, but if done successfully then you could sell items at other cities and gain a huge benefit.

'Huhuhu, good thing that Sid came along.'

Of course, Ark had no intention of selling the item directly.

It was a bag full of items worth 1000 gold, and he had no time to do business with other users.

He was prepared to leave the annoying part to Sid. Even though 10~20% of the profit would be given away, he would still make more than 500 gold without wasting time.

‘Once the quest is completed then it is certain that I will make a profit.’

As soon as he arrived in Cairo, he received this excellent quest!

The only thing on his mind was Lorenzo.

If Lorenzo dies, then he would earn Wolkosu’s wrath which would make it difficult to stay in Cairo. So the point of this quest was to protect Lorenzo rather than kill the thieves.

“Lorenzo, you’re in the back.”

“Ha, but”

“You are not allowed to be injured. If you’re injured here, how sad would your father be? You shouldn’t let the father who came here for you be sad. You know what I mean.....even if I don’t say it?”

He was different from the Ark who threatened to kill him with food. However, thinking about profit was enough for Ark’s character to change. Anyway Lorenzo was just a simple NPC so he blew out a sigh and nodded.

“Thank you so much. I’ll be careful.”

“Well done”

As soon as Ark received the promise, he tried to open the door.

All of a sudden, there was a flashing light and huge damage occurred.

-Using the element of surprise, you received a critical hit from the assassin’s skill. Damage 200X3

“Huk, what, what the?” Assassination? ‘

In an instant, 600 points of his health disappeared.

Ark was surprised and instantly withdrew.

Blurry forms emerged from the surroundings.

The company had their faces hidden in black hoods like a ninja. The first thing he thought of when he saw their features were Shambala.

The ‘Stealth’ and ‘Assassination’ skill was Shambala’s main attacks, but it wasn’t Shambala. Shortly after, two people dressed the same appeared from both sides of the house.

The red hand stamped on the top of the hood gave off a creepy feeling.

“Lorenzo”?

“Mo, I don’t know. I’ve never seen such dangerous guys?”

Lorenzo also shook his head in bewilderment.

At that time, the masked man muttered in a low voice.

"It would be impossible for that delinquent to know us."

"What are you guys? What do you want? "

"We're the dark brotherhood."

"The, the Dark Brothers! Surely you guys.....the Assassination Guild.....!"

Blood instantly drained from Lorenzo's face.

Living in Selebrid, Lorenzo had heard rumours of the Dark Brothers. However, Ark looked confused and still didn't understand

"Assassination Guild? Why would the guild try to assassinate me?"

The assassin then made a derisive noise.

"Kukukuk, this fellow is still slow to understand the situation."

"Eh? Yes, you?"

"I'm happy to see you again. Yes, it was quite difficult trying to find you. "

Andel.....!'

Ark muttered with a surprised voice.

The face of the assassin at the back was none other than Andel.

"Yes.....Have you recovered your senses yet?"

"The one who has to notice is you. Did you think I would let you take pleasure from messing with me?"

"Let's do this to the end?"

"That's the most welcome sound I ever head. Let's finally finish it."

"You bastard!"

When Ark lifted his sword, the three assassins in front blocked it.

"What the?"

"Didn't you hear? I hired assassins from the Dark Brother organization. "

"When I was in Selebrid, I heard a rumour about them. They are a secret organization composed of the most elite assassins. They specialize in the murder of foreigners. They

have such excellent skills that they charge an extravagant commission fee. What kind of grudge do you have against you.....”

Lorenzo murmured in a small voice.

NPCs that specialize in hunting users?

What ridiculous thing is he talking about?

This unexpected problem could be quite serious. If they specialize in killing users than their levels should be quite high. In addition, they must be armed with the professional skills for PVP.

‘Damn you, of all things this place.....’

Ark gave a frustrated face and the assassins suddenly attacked.

Chae Chang! Kakakak!

Ark immediately evaded and counter attacked.

If it was an ordinary monster, then considerable damaged would have been dealt. But the assassin avoided the attack using a strange movement to step back. AndThat was the opening bell for the fight.

“Kill him!”

The 3 assassins cleverly used a pincer attack to push Ark back. Ark was pressed by the sword attacks coming from all directions.

“Dedric, Skull! Plan B-1! ‘

Dedric and Skull each rushed to 1 assassin. Their airborne attacks used a 7: 3 ratio of attack and defense. Meanwhile, Ark was fighting the remaining assassin 1 on 1. They split their attack between the pets and Ark.

‘Oh my god, level 120!’

Ark groaned after he checked their level using Eyes of the Cat.

Ark’s current level was 90 and with the dark attribute bonus he reached level 120. However, the assassins’ default level was 120. The assassins’ would also receive a dark attribute bonus. In the end, he concluded that the difference was at least 10 levels.

Indeed, the assassins are the type to show off their skills.

Ark continued evading while countering the ghost sword.

However, who was Ark?

Ark was also armed with the specialized PVP skills of a Dark Walker.

Ark quickly changed his strategy and kicked out in conjunction with Snake’s poisonous attack. He fought the assassin with an enthusiasm like he would die any minute, and the assassin soon knelt to the ground after a blow.

‘Double critical chance!’

Ark used the opportunity to narrow the distance and swung his sword. However, a sharp metallic sound rang out and Ark was pushed back.

The other two assassins blocked his blow from either side of Ark. His summons was unable to impede the enemies like they normally would due to their numbers. Therefore, Ark's health went down to 50%.

"Sheesh, it's more difficult than I thought."

"Snake, recovery potion!"

Ark retreated a few steps and pulled out a potion.

No, as soon as he tried to drink. The assassin quickly pulled out a scroll. At the key moment he was about to drink the potion, a sound was heard.

Ark surfaced in front of a red warning message.

{Null recovery} scroll was activated. You can't use any items while you're in battle. {Duration: 30 minutes}

'No recovery?'

The reason that he didn't lose hope after discovering that the enemies were level 120 was because he had quite a lot of recovery potions saved.

While his opponent couldn't drink a potion due to being bothered by Snake, Ark safely could. When dealing with other users, this was the pattern Ark used to win. Thanks to that, he could engage in battles with higher level users without worrying.

However, now the situation was reversed due to one scroll.

He didn't have time to be surprised as the assassin shoved their swords at his chest.

"Huhuhu, why do you think I faced you alone? I know all the foreigner's battle strategy already."

Meanwhile, the assassin retreated and leisurely drank a potion. The situation continued a couple of times, with the assassins always keeping their health at 80%. However, without the recovery potion Ark's health decreased to 40%.

'Damn, that bastard!'

Ark glared at Andel standing a distance away.

Andel did not participate in the battle. If he interrupted the battle then he would become chaotic and he didn't see a reason for that.

Meanwhile, the assassins began to strengthen their attacks.

"Master, Master! Any more.....!"

Tadak! Tadak!

To make matters worse, Dedric and Skull were also gasping for help. The abilities of his summons were mid-level 40 at best. Until now, there were two reasons that they could deal with high level monsters. As the battle goes on, most of the monsters focus on Ark rather than his summons. Therefore, the pets were not subjected to concentrated attacks. And the second reason was that Ark could direct different plans depending on the circumstances. However, the assassins were different from normal monsters. When it was necessary, they would focus their attacks on the summons. In addition, Ark who was being helplessly pushed back couldn't even afford to direct his summons. The pets who didn't receive any support instantly reached a critical condition.

"I can't lose the summons here! "

"Dedric, Skull! Plan B-4! "

"I'm sorry. Master! "

The situation was even worse with the summons disappearing. The 3 assassins surrounded Ark and attacked with their swords. Then, Lorenzo who had anxiously watched as Ark went on the defensive yelled out and rushed in.

"Hey, bastards!"

But Lorenzo couldn't even damage the black robed assassins. Instead, he received a sound thrashing and was soon in critical condition.

"You should've been quiet if you wanted to live a few more minutes. Foolish fellow! "

The annoyed assassin casually threw his sword at the nuisance.

'Oh, no! '

The surprised Ark quickly rushed in front of Lorenzo. Although he wielded a sword, the dirk quickly penetrated his chest.

-Critical Hit 200 Damage!

Ark stumbled as his health fell to a critical condition.

"YouWhy did you go so far..... "

Lorenzo appeared puzzled.

There was no moral obligation or money at risk for Ark to jump in front of Lorenzo. The reason was that he hadn't finished his quest and if Lorenzo died it would become difficult. How could he give up a quest worth 400~600 gold when he could still salvage it?

Even if he died in this place, he would never give up gold. Even if the situation was enough to make him anxious, Ark didn't show it. If he died, then to the NPC he would seem like a messenger of justice.

"I promised Wolkosu. You can't be injured, you have to live and somehow reconcile with your father.

"You!"

He looked at Ark with an impressed face.

"There's no time to be chatting. We have to get out of here. Follow me!"

When an assassin tried to kill Lorenzo, the situation became more serious. Turning his body, Ark avoided the assassin and gained time for a retreat. Then, another assassin took out a scroll and shouted.

"Scroll [Magnetic] target Ark!"

At the same time, Ark's body experienced a huge attraction and was dragged towards the assassin.

"Ah, Ark-nim!"

"Don't look back, run! I'll come along soon!"

Ark resisted the pulling force with his full strength and shouted. Lorenzo glanced at him with unsure eyes before clenching his teeth and turning away. At that moment, Ark turned his body and rushed at the assassin. The acceleration caused by Ark's rush added to the effects of the [Magnetic] scroll caused the assassin to flinch and be hit. That moment was a chance for Ark.

"The chain skill Riposte!"

Ark shouted and used the Riposte skill to deflect the attacks back at the assassins. They turned to a solid mass and fell down. At the same time, the strong suction disappeared.

"Now!"

When Ark and Lorenzo ran away, Andel raised his voice and shouted.

"What are you doing? These guys! "

"Ouch, who knew he would use such a technique."

“Don’t worry though. Once the Dark Brother catches a game, they never miss.”

The assassins took out another scroll and used it.

{Trace} scroll, track the target. The location of the target can be determined if they are within a 1 km distance. {Duration: 30 minutes}

{Battle off disabled} scroll was activated. Even if the opponent is far away, the battle state isn’t released. {Duration: 30 minutes}

‘Oh my God! ‘

Ark’s face was haggard.

The talk of a professional assassin always seemed to be excessive advertisement.

Ark thought the battle state could be released which was why he ran more than 200 meters away. So the [Null Recovery] effect could be cancelled. Also, if he hid his body using ‘Stealth’ he would have an opportunity to sneak back and attack Andel.

However, just before he turned the corner two more scrolls were activated.

The assassin used [Trace] and [Battle off disabled]. Whether Andel knew Ark’s plan or not, the use of those two scrolls ruined it.

It means that all of Ark’s weak points were identified.

“It was a special scroll prepared in Kairote, just for him..... ‘

Sid had mentioned the effects of the special scrolls the other day. But he did not realise that it would have such an enormous effect.

It did no direct damage but if utilized well according to the situation, then it could mean the difference between winning and losing.

If there was time, he would study the effects of the scrolls more seriously but at the moment he did not want to back down.

‘When pursued by a group, it is time for some countermeasures.’

“We can’t stop it. Let’s split up.”

“Yes?” Ha, but

“Think about it, you won’t be any help to me. And the target of their [Trace] is me. When we scatter, they won’t chase after you.”

“But until I pay back life debt, I can’t just run away like this.”

“It’s not for you.”

“What?”

“Sid remained in your cabin. If you were to be damaged by the assassins’ attacks, there would be no one left to protect Sid as a foreigner in Kairote. It is a request. The only one I can trust is you. Please protect Sid.”

“Khuk.....I understand.”

While he was conflicted, Lorenzo eventually nodded.
The fact that he wouldn’t be any help against those guys and Ark knew it too.

“As soon as possible. Go before they detect us.”

“Come back alive”

“Don’t worry.”

Ark briefly replied before running through the dark backstreets.
He was separated from Lorenzo. If the quest fails then the worst situation was avoidable.

‘It is important to last 30 minutes’

Ark ran in an alley, thinking hard.
There was nothing Ark could do about the scroll combo he was under. No, honestly even without the scroll, he couldn’t guarantee the odds against three assassins.
So far, the NPC thieves he had faced were classified as general monsters. Their intelligence was quite high which made the battle more difficult, but it was nothing compared to a user. However, if the same monster had a combat attribute than that would be a different situation.
The Sylphid Knights of Jackson was a good example of this. Their combat method and skills was used faster than a user. And the same goes for assassins.
In the first place, the NPC that specializes in hunting users would have superior fighting skills than the Sylphid Knights.
It was the 3 worse NPCs to fight. In addition, there was also Andel. He stayed back because he didn’t want to become chaotic, but if the assassins started losing than he would probably interfere.

‘No matter how much he thought about it, there was no way to win.’

However, it was also impossible to get away.

[Null recovery], [Trace], [Battle off disabled].

The scroll combo he was under meant that any method of escape was blocked.
The situation had become gloomier.

‘Damn it, that bastard Andel! If such a method wasn’t used.’

It would be easy. If he used the same method than he had confidence that he would win. He wouldn't have ignored it if he was Andel. However, Ark had never even considered it.

Andel had a lot more knowledge about New World than Arc! He was also friends with Alan who had enormous funds and resources available.

If he was only dealing with one person, but Andel took advantage of the assassin game system and scrolls. So Ark was confused about how to come up with a counter attack.

'This is why I was reluctant to associate with players.....

He didn't want to make enemies or even associate with friends.

But from the start, it went wrong and he eventually ended up in this situation.

"Over here!"

Suddenly, a black shape fell from the roof and blocked him.

The Dark Brother assassin!

Ark turned around and flinched as the other assassins fell behind and beside him.

With the [Trace] scroll tracking his movements, it was like Ark was dancing in the palms of Buddha, and the complicated maze of alleys made it easy to surround him.

'In the end am I prepared to die? '

When you die, your stats drop by 6 points. Your experience also drops 30%. At level 90, 30% wasn't a small amount.

He would have to hunt for 12 hours around the clock to gain back the experience.

But he was even angrier at the thought of Andel being the one to cause his death.

Of course, Andel came rushing forward to see Ark's end.

"Kukukuk, look at this spectacle. Even though you made an excellent gesture at the end."

"Bah, this is your best? After this encounter I will not forgive you. Understand? I'll attack again and this time I'll really strip you naked. I promise. I'll chase you all across the continent until you're naked!"

"You're a really stupid fellow. Do you still not grasp the situation? "

"What?"

"You will be the one stripped naked, not me. Stupid! Hey, begin."

At Andel's command, the 3 assassins all took out scrolls at the same time and activated it.

"[Seize] scroll. Target Ark!"

Ark looked at the scrolls on the hands of the black assassins. A red warning message then flashed.

{{Seize} scroll activated.

When the designated target dies, there is a 50% chance that an equipped item will drop.

{Duration: 30 minutes}}

“What, what?”

Ark’s face turned white and terrified.

50% chance to drop equipped items? There was also such a scroll?

Furthermore, the same scroll was used three times.

While the scroll had a cool down, the assassins could use it repeatedly. And there were 3 assassins.

If 3 people use it at the same time, then the effect will stack up three times. In the end the odds of dropping equipment was 150%. While the probability never existed to this degree, it he was unlucky then he would drop 3 items at once.

Currently if he lost any of his items, it would be difficult to get them again. In the worst case scenario, Lancel’s Sword would drop which would cost him \$30

‘What’s moreOn the subject why are these NPCs recklessly using scrolls! ‘

Ark glared at them with absurd eyes but there was something Ark didn’t know.

The more powerful scrolls in battle had a value of more than 30 gold for one. In other words, the assassins used 210 gold just on scrolls.

300 gold was used to hire the assassins and 210 gold to buy the scrolls.

All the scrolls were privately financed by Alan and Andel and then given to the assassins.

Let’s go capitalism!

Just like in reality, money was also important to the game.

“You are unlucky. You don’t know what might have happened if it was another place, but this was the lawless city of Kairote. There are no active restrictions on assassins. In addition, would you make a resurrection place before Cairo?”

“Let’s see?”

Ark coolly shot back, but inside his heart fell.

Andel seemed to guess his predicament as he smirked.

“Heh, just like a masterpiece! After all, there isn’t a village near Cairo. It is impossible for you to have made anywhere else a resurrection point. And this is a place where the guards don’t move if users are attacked. No, here they are more hostile to normal players than chaotic players. If you are resurrected in a non-chaotic state then you would also have to flee the town. Well, even if you escape the town the result would still be the same. Kik kik, are you finally seeing sense? Who will be the one stripped naked?”

Every word impaled him.

If he was in an ordinary village, there was no risk of a non-chaotic player being killed repeatedly. However, this was the chaotic city of Cairo, where they were adverse to non-chaotic users. That's why they had to be careful that the resurrection place was updated. However, Ark hid his unease and replied sarcastically.

"Do you think I'm a fool? Do you think I would renew the resurrection point at a crazy place like this?"

"Bah, it doesn't matter, just kill him!"

The assassins rushed at Andel's command.

The first scroll was triggered and 15 minutes had finally passed.

The remaining time was 15 minutes, but he was still in a battle state and the assassins would not stop pursuing him.

While he was running away, it was fortunate that his health recovered to 30%.

The assassins quickly attacked Ark from three directions.

If he focused on just one of them it would be detrimental. After 1 minute he quickly fell to a critical condition.

'I made a mistake; there is no way to beat these guys! '

Ark glared at Andel with cold eyes.

'He's convinced that I updated the resurrection place here. When I die the most logical thing to do is stay dead. I'm not bound for death! If just one NPC died then they wouldn't recover quickly enough. Then I'll hide using 'stealth' and run away in the meantime.'

That was the best plan at the moment. In addition, if the fired assassin made a mistake then even Andel won't be able to sleep easily.

'An adventure! '

"Blessing of the Sea Spirit!"

When the special effects of Adelaine's Necklace were activated, blue waves appeared and surrounded him. At the same time, defense increased by 40% and 500 mana was restored. At the same time, Ark opened a bag and pulled out a stack of old swords. Andel pushed one of the assassins and rushed forward.

Take this, Blade Storm!

When he activated the skill, cracks like spider webs spread on the swords. With an intense glare, he swung the sword at Andel.

Blessing of the Sea Spirit was followed by Blade Storm In his critical condition, Adrenaline was activated. This is was Ark's powerful deadly combo.

When the assassins belatedly noticed Ark's intent, they threw a dagger. But the 40% increase in defense meant that Ark's health didn't really decline. With any luck, he would still be able to take down the level 60 Andel.

Looking at the swirling sword debris, Ark was convinced.

However, at the moment Andel lightly laughed.

He pulled out one more scroll, activated it and disappeared only to appear a few meters away.

'What, [Warp].....!'

The swirling blade storm disappeared into the air. Ark's eyes narrowed in despair.

His deadly combo which used all his energy failed because of a scroll. For a while he was discouraged until he felt the pain. The assassins had thrown two daggers which plunged into his back.

Ark stumbled and leaned on a railing.

He looked down and saw the mouth of the hole spread out infinitely.

It was the hell that you wouldn't be able to survive once you fell in. Andel had chased him across Cairo right to the edge of hell.

When Andel used [warp], he rushed right to the edge of a place Ark guaranteed was hell. If Blade Storm was used just one step closer, he would've stepped off the edge into hell.

No, Ark's fate had already been decided.

"So you're also here!"

The assassins had been throwing the dagger again.

Ark swung his sword at the daggers but one still became stuck in his shoulder.

Ark flinched and retreated while a number of thoughts crossed his mind.

"There is no way for me to survive in this state anyway! "

And if he died and dropped an item then it would end up in Andel's hands. Even if he didn't want to die it couldn't be helped.

'I'd rather have the items lost forever than end up with Andel! '

Ark ground his teeth together and asked.

Even if he withstood it, there is a 100% chance he'll die. However, what if he fell into hell?

It's clear that he was going to die. But at least it wouldn't be because of Andel. The items dropped also wouldn't end up with Andel And maybe even

There may be a possibility of 0.01%.

There was no choice.

Ark immediately turned and jumped on the railing.

Daggers just barely missed his neck as he fell and also flew overhead. And at his feet spread an endless abyss.....!

Act 8 : At the end of Hell

.....What now? ‘

He fell at an enormous speed through a dark space.

It felt like he was being drawn somewhere. He couldn't even fathom how long he had been falling or how much further there was to fall. However, one thing is certain. The longer it took to reach the bottom, the more the damage would exponentially increase. If the flow did not appear within a few minutes.....

‘My remaining health was 150, even if I use the Racial Special Skill of the Cat Knight, I would still die. ‘But after that was the problem.

The hell was in the Cairo region, but he didn't know if the depths exceeded 1 kilometre or if the effects of the scrolls had disappeared.

However, the [Seize] scroll used just before falling didn't designate an area or distance limitation.

If he died, then he must be prepared to lose 1~2 of his equipped items.

It would be a fatal blow. But that wasn't really the issue he was worried about.

‘Andel.....!’

He had not considered his spirit.

Andel hired assassin with a few hundred gold. He also came forward and chased after Ark directly.

He gave up on questing and levelling up.

His intention to become the best in New World had changed to getting revenge on Ark.

‘As long as he is convinced that my resurrection place is Cairo, then he would guard it even for the few days until I revive. ‘

Andel was such a person. He wouldn't be able to sleep and guard the resurrection point 24 hours a day. But when the assassins also guarded in shifts then there would be no gaps for Ark to revive.

Eventually Ark would have to log in or lose access to his items and there was a high probability that he would be PKed.

The NPCs in the lawless city of Cairo won't lift a finger to help users.

In this situation, rules don't exist.

‘Am I really going to end up like this?’

When he thought about it, his chest fluttered uneasily.

It is nonsense. How far have I raised Ark?

Am I really not going to be able to play the game anymore because of Andel?

New World might just be a game, but to Ark it was his reality and life. Ark was able to eat rice every day and pay for his mother's medical bills thanks to New World.

'I just found it. I desperately found it. A way that I could live. And a place I want to live. I can't give up. I would never give it up just because of Andel'

He made up his mind about what he wanted to do.

He had to show his guts.

Because that was the only thing Ark had.

'I have to live! To protect yourself from Andel, you have no choice but to live, think Ark! Think of ways to survive! It's not real. Nothing is impossible in New World. If you don't give up then there must be a way to survive! '

Ark desperately rolled his head.

Meanwhile, Ark had been falling and could finally see the ground.

He was approaching pillars that rose from the ground. At the bottom of the hell, there appeared to be some monster fangs.

A spark suddenly occurred in Ark's mind.

'Hell's fangs! Ok, maybe! '

Ark struggled to maintain his posture in thin air.

And he clenched his sword and concentrated with both eyes.

'The chances are only fleeting! If I'm 0.1 seconds too late or early then I'm screwed! '

The sight of the ground where he could hit his head felt even more terrifying. His body would break like a tomato unless he had the right timing. However, Ark clenched his teeth together and opened his eyes wider. And just as the bottom approached!

'Riposte!'

Ka ka ka kak! Jja Jjang!

With his full power, Ark swung his sword.

He pushed at the stone pillar with his sword.

At the moment, all his power was concentrated on Ark's arm and shoulders. Checking the distance of the stone pillar approaching at high speed

wasn't much different from an offensive from an enemy. When he struck with Riposte, he gambled that a counterattack would occur. The special effect of Riposte was to push the opponent back 10 meters, but if opponent was too strong than the shock would be returned to Ark. Using Einstein's principle of relativity the results were easily predicted.

Bump!

Ark's body stopped in the air, as the brakes were jammed. At the same time, the damage caused by the fall was annulled for the moment. Ark didn't miss the opportunity and kicked the stone pillar with his foot. And using the elasticity of his body, he avoided the stone pillar and broke his fall. A violent impact shook his shoulders and back.

-Cat Knight's ability to alleviate the damage of falling by as much as 50%. Using your flexibility, the damage of the fall was reduced by 30%.

'It's a success! '

Ark teared up at the sight of the message. It was worth every moment he spent fighting thieves and levelling up Riposte until he formed blisters on his hand. It was a desperate moment where he only had 0.1 second to use Riposte before being smashed into a stone pillar. Using the special ability of the Cat Knight, he only received 50 damage. It was worth it to dig up this heroic achievement! However, before he could celebrate a red light appeared in succession.

-You were attacked by Blood Sucking Leeches 5 damage!

"What, what the?"

Ark said in surprise. In the area surrounding Ark were red fist-sized leeches. Some of them were already attached to his body and sucking blood. Using his sword, Ark was able to kill three or four of them but more took their place. In an instant, his health was sucked out until he only had 30 left.

"Damn it! Did I survive all that just to be killed by leeches? Spirit of the Cat!

Nyahhhh!

Ark's pupils' glowed gold as the form of a large black cat appeared.

He revealed sharp fangs and he stared at them and the leeches instantly stiffened. All the gnawing leeches sucking his blood also stiffened and fell off. The floor was covered with leeches.
The Spirit of the Cat caused paralysis which lasts for 1 minute!

'1 minute to kill all the leeches. And his skills used mana. I only have 30 health left which means I'm screwed once the paralysis wears off. I have to get out of here for the time being'

Ark used Eyes of the Cat to search for a way out.

Then Ark saw a dark hole which could barely fit one person on the side of the room. There was no line. Ark stepped on leeches as he headed towards the hole. Fortunately, the leeches didn't chase after him.

Ark entered the whole and looked for a little more space. The hole was longer than he thought.

He crawled along the whole for a couple of minutes before his arms slipped. Like a slide at a swimming pool, the floor suddenly sloped and dropped somewhere. Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

"Ah, huh?"

Hell's Underground Labyrinth
You've discovered the underground labyrinth that emits a terrible odour in the depths of Cairo
Perhaps this labyrinth has existed even before Cairo was built.

It is unclear what the purpose for building it was. But as it was underneath Cairo, all the filth and corpses naturally entered the labyrinth

Due to all the filth dumped from Cairo, the labyrinth changed to a stench filled one capable of covering a further deformity

-You have found an undiscovered dungeon. When you register with the Hall of Fame, you can gain 1000 experience and 70 Fame. Would you like to register?

"The [Trace] scroll has stopped reacting."

"Tired"

"That guy was stronger than I thought."

The assassins flocked to the edge of the abyss.

It was hard to even fathom the depth to the bottom of the hell. Once you fall there was a 100% chance of dying. No, even if he survived there was no way of getting back up. He would have no choice but to die and resurrect.....

“He fell into the hell so that it wouldn’t be possible to pick up his equipment.”

“I don’t care about that. It is trivial because he was dressed shabbily and his items wasn’t worth spending all that gold on scrolls. I just wanted to make that guy a beggar. ”

“Well, then I don’t careFor the time being, is it done?”

“Not yet”

Andel said with a cool smile.

“This is just the beginning. When I think of that fellow, it isn’t possible to just leave it like this. That fellow has to pay me back for everything. Even when he is stripped naked and all his stats reduced to zero! I’ll kill him a hundred times more.

Andel said forcefully as he turned around.

“It is certain that he will return to Cairo. Because I expect you to guard the resurrection point, you won’t be able to return immediately. But he is a candidate so he might not connect for a while. From now on, be patient. That noob also did it to me for several days....Even if it takes several months, we have to kill and kill again until he finally loses access.

Andel led the assassins towards the quartermaster.
A person’s grudge was a scary thing.

“Refuse registration.”

Ark naturally rose to his feet.

Andel would be looking for him for payback.

There was no reason to do foolish things for information.

‘The bottom of the hell was connected to a dungeon.....’

Ark removed the filth from his body and looked around. The complex pathway was made of dark brown bricks intricately linked together. Hell's underground labyrinth was its original name but it was now the sewage system for Cairo. Rotten water reached the ankle and a bad stench wafted from the mountains of filth scattered all over. It was a situation that was horrible for the eyes and the nose.

The realistic scenario meant he actually had to think about it.

'Okay, what now '

Of course, the most urgent problem was to recover his health from its current state of 30 points. Ark made food and thought for a while as it recovered his health. For the time being, he had survived. The worst situation where he wouldn't be able to connect to the game anymore was avoided. However, it was too early to rejoice due to the ambiguous situation.

The first time he came to Cairo and saw the information about the hell, it said that there was no record of anyone escaping the hell after they fell in.

However, Ark thought positively.

'To be more precise, the place I am now is not the hell.

It is a hidden Dungeon. There wouldn't be a dungeon with no exit. Yes, for the time being I'll secure an exit.'

He'll look for a way out to get revenge on Andel and then explore the dungeoneither way his first priority was to secure his own safety.

Now, 'not dying' is the most important thing.

'The fact that it is a labyrinth dungeon means that it would definitely contain monsters.'

"Summon Demon, Dedric!"

As soon as his spiritual power was restored, he summoned Dedric.

A dim light shone and Dedric appeared with his nose crinkled and frowned.

"Phew, master. You're alive. Ugh, this place is.....? "

"The situation is like this. Anyway, it is urgent to find the exit from here. Please navigate around and search for it. Also notify me immediately if monsters appear."

"Kuu.....Seems to be going by the nose. I got it."

Dedric chose a path and flew along it.

But Dedric returned 2 minutes later and shook his head.

"There is no visible exit around here. And the terrain is too complex for me to find my way back. "

"Any monsters?"

"Not that I sae"

"Really? Strange. There should be some....."

Burst!

Ark had taken one step forward down a passage. When suddenly something popped out of the ground under him and grabbed his ankles.

"What, what the?"

Ark flinched and looked down at the water where rotten hands were holding his ankle. Ark swung his sword and hastily stepped back.

It was then that an audible noise was heard.

It was a sleeping monster made of bones that gradually raised its' body. The rotting flesh was attached to the bones of the monster.....where there was nothing there before, there was now 6 monsters surrounding Ark.

'Polluted skeleton?'

It was level 110!

Dalgurak, ttadadak, dalgeurak!

The heads of the six skeletons turned around and focused on Ark. After a moment, flame spewed from their eyes as a defense mechanism as they rushed at him with a rusted long sword.

"Oh damn! Snake, nerve paralysis poison! "

Ssak ssak ssak!

Ark wielded his sword and twisted it.

Five skeletons instantly met a critical hit and were pushed back. However, the skeletons weren't paralyzed.

Their flesh was rotting off the bone. Of course there wouldn't be nerves to paralyze. Furthermore, the Polluted Skeletons were skeletons who had been transformed by pollutants.

The beginner's deadly poison that Snake produces is just like water to them. Rather, the poisonous effect restored health.

'Poison absorption characteristic? Why do I meet monsters immune to poison at this time? '

However, that was not the end of the problem.

-You received a blow from the Polluted Skeleton. 130 damage!

'Tetanus' Reaction is slowed and you will receive 10 damage every 5 seconds for 1 minute.

All of the skeletons wielded their weapons.

He was unlucky. There were all kinds of germs in their dirty swords, which meant there was a high probability of getting tetanus.

Tetanus stunned the body and made it heavier. This made it difficult to evade the attacks of the skeleton however that wasn't the only thing.

'.....So far, I have only been relying on poison? '

After he received the serpent poison skill, it certainly made battles easier.

He could use the poison in combination with kicks since most opponents were stunned.

In particular, Ark frequently used the poison nerve paralysis. It was a poison which paralyzes the arm and legs and made it easier to disable an opponent quickly. Therefore, Ark had unknowingly relied on it during battle to slow the monsters.

That was one of the reasons he wasn't able to respond to the movements of the assassins. Professional assassins would have immunity to most of the racial special skills held by users.

He used the combo skill of Sword-Hand combat with Riposte. The success rate of the same poison was also quite low.

'Yes, I've been far too complacent. I've relied too much on those skills. It made the battle easier but lowered his actual battle skills. Skills such as Eyes of the Cat and poison are important, but honing the basic skills is also important in fighting enemies. I'll focus on my Sword-Hand combat skill! '

Yes, that is the basis of the game.

Warriors Sword Mastery, Magicians magic and Archer's archery.....The most important thing to fully hone your skills is to properly utilize the jobs primary weapon! In Ark's case, that consisted of Sword-Hand combat.

'Wake up Ark! Now is not the time to let your attention wander!'

His aim was to take revenge with the enemies blade appears. It was something he knew as a novice. You don't know when something basic could be useful.

'I'm not playing around!'

Ark bit his lips so tightly that it started bleeding.

The brain moves the body.

It is natural for the movement to change when the mind changes!

If you don't have a resolute mind then your reactions are slower, but when your mind is resolute then change quickly occurs. It was disrespectful to say that a battle doesn't rely on your mind.

'If the opponent is open then you have to figure out the flow of the battlefield!'

Ark quickly widened his view of the battlefield.

Now he had to tackle the skeleton wielding a sword and looked at the movements of the skeletons with skin.

"Dedric, the rear! Plan D-2! "

Dedric flew to the rear of the skeletons while Ark quickly attacked.

Ark went forward without looking back and forth.

The skeleton wielded his sword. Ark instantly twisted and shoved his sword in the lower back.

Counter attack!

The skeleton stepped back shocked.

Then two skeletons wielding swords attacked from both sides.

Ark had already identified their movements and expected the attack. Ark lowered his body to the ground and did a sweeping low kick.

The low kick was not a technique seen in normal taekwondo moves.

Ark saw the move in a Martial Arts film and integrated it into his kicks.

The skeletons were hit by the kick and fell down.

They were light because they were only bones and collapsed easily. He then kicked the skeletons until they were disassembled piece by piece.

'That's three of them killed! '

Ark turned to find his next opponent.

Ttadak, ttadadadak, tadadak!

“What, what the?”

The many bones began to get stuck together like a magnet. Minus the broken and cracked bones, the others joined together until they formed perfect skeletons. Their vitality was also 100%. It was an unexpected situation.

‘Sheesh, it’s not enough to knock them apart, I have to destroy all their bones?’

Ark swung his sword again.

However, unlike before it was meaningless to attack the gaps in the bones. He focused each blow on a single region in order to destroy it. So he could avoid having the skeleton’s body reassembled again.

Thanks to that, the battle lengthened considerably. But after he used his Spiritual Power to summon skull and distribute the attacks, it took around 15 minutes to destroy all the skeletons.

After they finally finished off the skeletons with the help of Skull, Dedric shook his head.

“It’s tragic.....a quarrel within the same family.”

Ttak ttak ttak!

Skull chewed on a shattered bone.

Although the battle ended safely, Ark couldn’t feel relieved.

‘This dungeon ...The degree of difficulty is higher than I thought’

The level of the skeletons was 110, but Ark was around 120 thanks to the dark attribute bonus.

If he was just dealing with six skeletons then there were no significant problems. However, no matter how insignificant the opponent there was still a possibility of death. Additionally, if he was hit once then he would also receive tetanus. But was that all? If he got distracted even for a short time, then the skeletons would reassemble and his health would fall until he was in a critical condition.

‘Although he won against six skeletons, against eight he couldn’t be sure of his chances.’

That was the problem.

In the other dungeons, he could use Dedric to scout the place first and if it was too dangerous then he could avoid it. However, these guys suddenly appeared from the ground to grab his ankles. That means he wouldn't know their number until they appear.

'I don't know when I would be attacked by surprise so managing my health is the most critical thing. And I have to move as carefully as possible so that the skeletons don't react. If a skeleton appears to fight, I'll just retreat.'

Ark grabbed the items from the skeletons and carefully walked forward step by step. How far did he walk? Just as he turned the corner, his foot sank and he fell into the water. He was sucked in by this huge force and dragged somewhere else.

'This is, what is this? '

A message floated in front of the confused Ark.

You fell into the wormhole. Hell's underground labyrinth is complicated like a spider web with wormholes everywhere. If you fall into one you will be taken by force to another location

Peng!

A sound was made as Ark forcefully stopped next to a drain.

He raised his body and looked around. However, the place was completely different from the area he was in before. Suddenly he heard Dedric's voice in his ear.

"Ma.....Master? How? Where? "

"Dedric! Are you alright?"

"Master.....you're alive! All of a suddensurprisingly disappeared."

Ark was spiritually connected to Dedric so they could communicate within a fixed distance. However the distance must be quite fair, since the reception was falling.

"You don't know where I am?"

".....I don't know, I guess....No"

I understand."

Ark sighed and cancelled Dedric and Skull's summoning. However, his spiritual power hadn't recovered enough to summon them again. So he was there without any summons and he had to wait until his spiritual power recovered.

"Damn, who knew this dungeon had such dangerous and complex wormholes? This damn dungeon..... "

Ark started grumbling.

Suddenly something fell with a patter over his shoulder.

Ark moved his hand where sticky mucus was stuck.

"What is this? Ugh! Is it filth? In some ways, I feel really bad.....Huk! "

Ark raised his eyes and let out a muffled scream without thinking.

On the ceiling was a giant gelatinous mass of objects. Viscous slime fell and the translucent monster moved its body! Ark had no time to move as the gaze of the monster turned to him and a red light flashed.

-You have suffered damage from the acidic digestive juices of the Polluted Poison Slime. 50 damage!

"S, slime?"

The scream did not come from his mouth.

The slime completely surrounded Ark and covered his nose and mouth. Every time, it did crazy damage and his health rapidly decreased.

Ark frantically struggled and pushed at the slime until he managed to escape. He turned and saw the passageway blocked by the giant wriggling slime body.

The Polluted Slime was level 130.

"Slime?" That's a slime? '

Ark of course knew about slimes.

It was a monster that was often seen in the early stages of most online games. But the slimes that Ark knew weren't this ugly. They were plump and fluffy..... you know?

It was more like a mascot that receives the users' love than a mascot. However, the slime in front of him was something that no user would be interested in. It wasn't cute and the stench was enough to make him feel sick.

Meanwhile, it extended its body and wrapped one piece around Ark's arm. Red light flashed and acid damage occurred.

The blow only did 50 damage, but his health was being steadily drained. The acid properties also damaged the durability of his equipment as well as his health. Ark caught and removed the slime from his arm.

‘The whole body is the digestive system? Then quickly!’

Ark swung his sword like lightning.
And then..... Slippery!

-Your attack missed!

The sword was impractical to attack the slime and it just slipped off its body. Confused, Ark stepped backwards and used Eyes of the Cat. Then a red point pointed to the centre of the slime’s body. If he had not seen it, he wouldn’t have known there was a shape like an eyeball there.

‘That is probably the nucleus of the slime.’

Physical attacks would do nothing unless he hit the nucleus. Ark had hunted monsters with the same characteristics on the seabed underwater. It was the jelly fish that wielded a large number of tentacles!
Like the slime, it also received little damage until he attacked the mouth of the jellyfish, and then large damage occurred.

‘But the slime was huge enough to fill the drain pipe. How would my sword even reach the nucleus in the centre? ‘

It sprayed mucus at him and Ark avoiding it while swearing.
Physical damage doesn’t work because it was immune to normal attacks. Perhaps it wouldn’t be a difficult opponent if he was a magician.

‘Is there a way to get rid of that mucous? ‘

That is the key!
A certain skill flashed through Ark’s head.

‘Yes, that’s the technique!’

“Snake, the most useless sword!”

Snake spat out the sword of Schnauzer and Ark grabbed it.

“Blade Storm!”

Arc used blade storm to destroy the sword and a devastating storm developed from its debris.

As expected, all the fragments bounced off the slime.

But Ark's target wasn't the damage from the debris. The fragments created a powerful vortex!

When the tremendous pressure exerted itself on the mucous, the slime became smaller and thinner because of the pressure.

The distance remaining between the nucleus was just 30cm!

It was enough for him to drive his sword through!

"Take this, Dark blade!"

Ark shot forward like an arrow and used Dark Blade.

The sword penetrated the nucleus of the slime. In an instant, 60% of its health was gone. And the slime trembled and the mucous thickened again. However, Ark could gather more mana by turning off anything he didn't need. Once again, he used the Blade Storm and Dark Blade combo to shave off the remaining health of the slime.

Kkuooooo! Peppeng!

A huge amount of slime exploded all over the place.

Thanks to that his body was covered in slime, but it did no further damage to him.

-Your level has risen.

"I did it!"

Ark blew out a sigh and sat with a flop.

The slime that was occupying the passage disappeared and Ark was finally able to look around properly.

The wormhole led him to a completely different place. Before the wormhole, the passage was made of broken bricks but this place was full of tree roots.

Ark recovered his stamina and moved along the path.

After walking a few minutes, he came across a rusty iron door.

'Is it the exit? '

Ark ran to the iron doors.

But no matter how he looked at it, he couldn't see a keyhole or door handle.

'Is it a dead end?'

Ark turned with a disappointed face.

But his fingers touched a rusted part which got stuck and once he pulled it away, a section of unevenness crumbled. When he turned back again, it seemed like some designs were carved underneath the rust.

Just in case, he shook off the rest of the rust.

Ark narrowed his eyes at the pattern that was being gradually revealed.

'Ara? This pattern is from the other dayOh, that's right! '

The design in which 3 triangles are overlapped!

Ark had seen the same design last time. It was the pattern that the Elder Meow Hassan showed him. It was the time when the Meow still traded. They were the residents who lived in the Underground World. He had forgotten about it because couldn't believe the symbol was here of all places!

Ark busily moved his hand until all the rust was gone.

There were small letters carved to reveal a sentence.

It was carved in unintelligible characters. However, Ark knew how to decipher such characters.

When he touched the characters, a pale light was emitted from his hand and the contents were deciphered right in front of him.

This place was sealed in accordance with the ancient vow.

Those who don't know this place can't enter.

A person with purpose could wake me up.

A person who makes the pilgrimage here with pride and speaks my name with respect will be able to cross.....

'Entrance to the Underground World' was discoveredYou have discovered information hidden in an Ancient Relic. You've found the entrance to the Underground World hidden in the dark and gloomy labyrinth of the underground hell. However, the entrance is firmly locked by an ancient vow.The terms of the Covenant states that to pass you need wisdom and humble pride. You need to find a way through the doors using clues hidden in the underground labyrinth. Information on the ancient relic 'Entrance to the Underground World' is acquired.

{Knowledge of Ancient Relics +15, Intelligence +5 and Fame increases by 30}

'The Entrance to the Underground World.....!'

He felt like he had been hit in the back of the head.

In fact, Ark hadn't guessed that the Underground World wouldn't be that far from Giran. According to Hassan, the agent representing the residents of the underground world came from the north-west.

The Meow's temple and shrine was also in the north-west.

Furthermore, the residents of the underground world had traded with numerous commercial cities, that there would surely be problems living near a large commercial city like Giran. However, the entrance exists in the Brandt Mountains underneath Cairo.

'Come to think of it.....'

Suddenly he remembered the name of the place where he fell.

Hell's underground labyrinth. Hell is the word for abyss in Buddhist terminology. In general, however it could also mean a subterranean world.

Apparently, the word hell itself was a clue for the underground world. It was a pretty ridiculous hint.

'I found the entrance while under the condition of not being able to die.'

Thus Ark's purpose became clear.

If a person fell into the hell and died then they would just revive. However, Ark was worried that there wouldn't be an exit. However, if the entrance leads to another world then even a child couldn't mistake it.

The inhabitants of the underground world used to participate in trade.

In other words, there was a way for them to go outside. It is unknown if there is an exit in the underground labyrinth, but it is pretty clear that an exit exists somewhere in the other world. If he entered the underground world then all his problems would be solved for the time being!

'And besides, there might be the second piece of the Three Marvels in the underground world!'

Ark's eyes lit up.

Finding the Three Marvels was important to Ark.

The Three Marvels was the source of a Dark Walker's power. He would get another skill and ability just like when he previously found the sculpture.

If that happened, his abilities would increase by leaps and bounds.

It now became even more urgent for Ark.

Andel was still waiting for him at the resurrection point in Cairo. At the moment, the circumstances meant that he had to hide but if he found the piece of the Three Marvels then that situation would change. In some cases, it may be possible for him to not only escape the crisis but also gain revenge.

'No, I will certainly get revenge. This is the place where I chose to live. I'm not playing the game for fun unlike you. I'll make him think twice about touching me!' That argument motivated him to survive even more.

Ark earnestly began exploring the dungeon. However, Hell's underground labyrinth was truly complicated and deserved the name labyrinth. Not only did it have complicated stairs leading to the 2nd floor, but the 3rd floor seemed like it was stuck in a three dimensional puzzle. It was not easy to remember the path after he passed it once. Then Ark remembered a forgotten skill.

'I didn't realise that it would be this useful.'

Ark had learnt new cartography skills. Using the cartography skills he learnt in the past from Hanson, the dungeon was automatically recorded. Thanks to checking the map, Ark slowly explored the geography of the dungeon. Of course, exploring a dungeon was not a relaxing situation.

Ttadak, ttadadak!

If he was even a little bit careless then skeletons would attack. They could be as little as four or as many as ten!

Thanks to that, every time Ark finished a battle he had to cook some dishes and eat. It was fortunate that he was able to avoid the big slime through reconnaissance. The slime gave a large amount of experience, but if he did not use blade storm then there was no way for him to win. This meant that every time he fought he consumed two swords. However, there was no reason to fight and waste his two bags of japtem. There were tricks that he used to make hunting a full day in the labyrinth easier. If he met a slime or was surrounded by more the seven skeletons, Ark would quickly escape through a nearby wormhole.

The labyrinth had invisible wormholes laid all over the place.

Once he used a wormhole, the position would automatically be updated on the map and he could take advantage of it to use [Warp], just like a scroll.

It was the way that he wanted to live, so the maze was a quite useful hunting ground. The skeletons gave large experience and the item drop rate was also high.

In addition, the labyrinth was the waste disposal site for Cairo. So the labyrinth had piles of junk scattered all over the place, just like Gallic's stomach.

Sometimes a useable item would appear.

Although in quite a few cases, if it went 'boom' then poison gas would spread but

'Aside from the stench, this wouldn't be a bad place to live.'

No, it wasn't bad. It was actually rather good

However, Ark's purpose was not to level up or gain items. It was to find out how to enter the underground world.

However, he had explored 70% of the dungeon and he still had no clue on how to enter the underground world.

It was recorded that the clue to solve the riddle was hidden in the dungeon, but he had looked around and the clue wasn't visible.

'It is a big deal. I'm beginning to feel the limits..... '

Ark looked at his bag with a worried expression.

After fighting with the skeletons, he always ends up with low health. Of course every time he finished he ate food but the ingredients were starting to run out.

In the first place he used many of the ingredients to make too much food for the ex-convicts, so he didn't have that much remaining.

Of course, even the labyrinth contained ingredients. However, the only things available in the filth infested labyrinth were the skeleton bones and random slime.

He had tested it and none of the food Ark made could be eaten.

That wasn't the only problem.

The item drop rate was high, which meant that it used up a lot of bag space. He had only spent 24 hours in the maze.

Ark's bag was full and although he equipped Snake's Item storage skill, 90% of that inventory was filled with items from other regions.

'Setting aside items, food was one of the highest priorities. If I run out of food then there is a high possibility that I will die'

Ark sighed in frustration and looked at a small hole in the ground.

It was a drain found in the middle of the maze.

The fact that water did not fill up the maze was due to these multiple drains. If so, perhaps it was linked to the outside. However, their diameter was 10cm at the most so he couldn't even get his head through.

'It is even impossible for a Hobbit to exit using this.'

Ark was getting up when he froze.
Suddenly a brilliant idea popped into his head.

‘Oh, yes! That wayIt might be possible! ‘

Act 9 : The Mystery of the Labyrinth

After Ark fell into the hell, the night and day had changed four times. In reality, that would be over 32 hours.

In the meantime, Andel and the assassins did not leave the resurrection place.

In some cases chaotic players who revived there sent them strange looks, but Andel did not pay them any attention.

Nevertheless, Andel quite enjoyed those times.

“That bastard Ark finally revealed that he is just a coward. He should be quite irritated by now? If a candidate was unable to connect for more than a day.....they would connect and check out the situation. But it is impossible. Once you caught my eye, you’re dead.”

However, Andel was only human and he wouldn’t risk his life for revenge. When it was time to eat a meal he ate and slept.

After a satisfying 40 hours, Andel eventually logged out of his unit and stretched while yawning.

“I’m not going to be here for a day. Okay?”

“Of course.”

Next to him the assassin nodded.

The assassins were camped in front of the quartermaster and were alternating between sleeping and guarding. At one time there were always two people awake, so it would be no problem if Ark suddenly revived.

“Usually the request is only for a month, but if you request it then we will guard this place for a year until it is complete.”

“Okay, I’ll believe you.”

Andel gave a satisfied look and cut the connection.

“When I see the technology of the foreigners, it sure is weird.”

An assassin muttered as Andel disappeared from sight.

However, NPCs can't really worry. The system does not allow for curiosity in the NPC.

After Andel disappeared, the assassins went back to staring at the resurrection point. Gawking gawking

At that time, there were people staring from the woods.

He carefully looked at the assassins before running through the forest.

The small feet squeezed his body between tall trees as he looked back. He looked around restlessly and repeated the pattern.

It was like a breathtaking (?) scene from a spy movie as he arrived at the cabin on the hill.

"Whoa, a broke into a sweat at what I found."

After he entered the cabin, the small figure took off his hood.

The visage of the small figure was that of the hobbit, Sid.

During the time that Ark was falling into the hell, Lorenzo fled to the cabin unharmed.

After explaining the situation to Sid, they were waiting for Ark to contact them at the cabin.

The anxious Lorenzo quickly approached.

"So? Do you have any news about older brother?"

Ark had gone with Lorenzo to kill the thieves and had protected him when the assassin threw a dagger at Lorenzo. Of course, it was because of the quest.

However, as a NPC Lorenzo was naive and felt that he owed a considerable debt to Ark.

Since that day, Lorenzo had referred to Ark as his older brother.

Sid shook his head with a dark countenance.

"Not yet. No one has seen Ark in Cairo."

"After retreating, did he get defeated by those guys?"

"Well I think so."

"Damn! Because of me.....!"

Lorenzo exploded with rage as he hit the desk. He suddenly asked.

"But they're using a strange technique. After a serious injury they could teleport to the Quartermaster. As older brother is a foreigner would he also be able to do that?"

“That’s the problem.....”

Sid replied ambiguously with a pained face.

Andel and the assassins were waiting for Ark at the resurrection place.

That meant that Ark was certainly dead.

It was impossible to wait at the Quartermaster for a person who wasn’t dead. Perhaps Ark did not revive because he guessed such a situation.

‘He was called Andel? I don’t know what the relationship is between him and Ark-nim but it must be bad. It was such that he even waited at the resurrection point. Does that mean he will quit the game?’

Sid couldn’t tell if Ark had done the same thing to Andel.

In any case, their interaction wasn’t very good.

With Andel and the assassins guarding the quartermaster, Ark couldn’t even connect to the game. And Sid had no way of knowing how long it would last.

‘I wish I had Ark’s phone number so it would be a little better.....’

Sid sighed in frustration.

Thump, thump, thump!

Suddenly sounds were heard from the door, banging into something.

The surprised Sid and Lorenzo exchanged nervous glances.

‘Is it them? Did those guys follow us back here?’

Lorenzo who imagined the worst approached the door and lifted his sword.

“I can’t do it. Sid please escape to the back door while I try to block them.

“Ha, but”

“There’s no time to argue. Listen to what I have to say? I owe my life to big brother. He asked me for a favour and I don’t want to break it. Because I care about the fellow, please hurry while I buy time.”

Lorenzo spoke in a low voice during the touching scene.

All of a sudden, an object entered through the bottom of the door. It was a shadow that was creeping forward. Lorenzo quickly raised his sword while Sid raised his hands and shouted.

“Wait! It.....! ”

Saek saek saek!

At the sight of the object, Sid lifted his voice in welcome. It was the surprisingly long tongue of Ark’s belt.....No, it was a snake.
Lorenzo looked at Sid, embarrassed.

“What, what! This snake is?”

“It’s not just a snake. This snake is Ark’s pet.”

“What?” Older brother’s? In addition to the bat and skull?”

“Yes! And if this snake is back.....that mean Ark-nim is out there!”

Sid hugged the snake.

Snake expressed his happiness by twining around Sid’s body- but the hobbit was too short- and climbed on top of the table. And he started vomiting out items from his mouth.

After a long time. Items were stacked on top of the table.
Snake began squirming his body and making a weird shape.
What is it doing? Sid stared blankly before he realised.

“It’s a letter! It must be a message from Ark-nim!”

Sid took out a piece of paper and pen and wrote down what the snake produced.

For Sid.

Sid. I am alive for the time being.

Due to the circumstance, for the time being I won’t be able to go there. So I will send Snake on my behalf in the future.

Snake will give you items to organize and please send any required items to me through Snake.

I need food and potions from the store and well as repair boxes.

Also please send paper and a pen.

“.....So I have to organize the items and sell the japtemAs expected from Ark-nim.....!”

Sid muttered with a tired expression.

Then. That was the solution that Ark came up with for his worries about japtem. Ark finally found an exit through a small drain that led to the outside. It was 10cm in diameter, and although many snakes wouldn't be able to pass through Ark had an insane idea. Therefore he placed all the items he needed to sell in Snake and sent it to the cabin where Sid was hiding with Lorenzo.

"Anyway that's it. It's all done. If Ark-nim is alive then you don't have to worry about assassins for the time being. Bah, morons. So even if it takes a while wait for me there..... "

Sid collected the items from Snake while he was moved to tears and had to wipe his runny nose.

Then he put the hood back on and sneaked into Cairo using the [Lie] scroll. He organized the japtem and came back with Ark's required items which Snake swallowed.

"Snake, be careful!"

Ssak ssak ssak!

Ssnake nodded and with eyes filled with duty, crawled to the ground.

"Park So-mi ssi"

"Yes,"

Hyun-woo requested after being asked by the reception. He was approached by the staff who extended a statement

"This is the full 5,210,000 won. Would you like to pay it with a card? "

"Eh, 5,210,000 won?"

Ark asked again with a surprised expression.

"Up until last month, it was just over 4,500,000 won?"

"The expenses went up a little this month. Didn't you see the letter of information?"

The staff held out the letter of information.

He read the list that the hospital typed that showed the treatment for each patient. But the bottom line was that the hospital bills were raised due to inflation. Finally, the hospital was also succumbing to the inflation surge.

In fact, the talk about raising hospital bills occurred a few months ago.

However, public opinion had been blocking it.

'The dangers of health care privatization are revealed.'

"Is the patient sealed to a chair? "

A current events program was broadcasted every day, and the parent organizations for the opposition against hospital privatization was shown as well.

But in the end it was decided to raise the hospital bills.

Although, frankly Hyun-woo did not expect the hospital costs to stay the same. Whether it is a game or reality, everything relies on power.

The hospital had a vested interest while the people who opposed raising hospital bills were mostly poor.

Isn't it clear which group would win when the two of them clashed? The government which was supposed to stand with the people decided in the end to privatize health care and turn a blind eye to the common people.

.....When was it?

It was the same story when the government first talked about privatizing public enterprises.

The people of the Republic of Korea aren't stupid.

Of course, there was many invested in opposing the privatization and more than 100,000 participated in protests by lighting a candle.

Although he didn't participate in the protests, the majority of ordinary people supported them. It was clearly a public sentiment. But the government was unshaken and did not side with public sentiment.

Rather, they presented the candlelight protests as violent demonstrations and used it to push privatization.

Of course, the Government pushed it but the problem was also caused by people who didn't carewas?

It is quite common for the public sentiment to change quickly.

It was a suitable word. But they public sentiment doesn't mean much to people with money and power. It did not mean the poor. It was a sad world for people who aren't favoured.

For people like Hyun-woo, they have no power and no choice but to live with the climbing costs.

"How much?"

Hyun-Woo sighed as the staff replied with an irate expression.

“5,210,000 won?”

‘Damn it, selling the Fire Slayer would barely cover this month’s bills.’

When he first checked his account it felt like he was walking on clouds. However, after paying for a variety of utilities as well as rent, food and medical bills his original balance of 14,000,000 won went down to 5,000,000 won. Well, he did have a surplus of ten million won.

‘Ok, this month is black’

Hyun-woo tried to soothe himself as he headed to the 2nd floor. When he arrived at the 2nd floor rehabilitation centre, he immediately saw his mother through the glass windows. When he saw her with the professional therapists taking one step forward, his depressed mood became much better.

‘She’s already doing walking practice!’

On the other hand, it increased his motivation to work harder to make money.

“That.....that’s right. Money is important.

The good reason for the Government privatizing health care was to improve the quality of the medical services.

Fortunately, that promise was kept.

Under private management, the healthcare service definitely improved. At the state-of-the-art rehabilitation centre, his mother received one on one treatment with a profession therapist in accordance with management. From exercise to eating.

Thanks to that, his mother’s illness was rapidly taking a turn for the better.

And unless Hyun-woo fell behind in the hospital bills, then such care would continue.

Hyun-woo still remembered the hospital scene from a while ago.

Because the hospital bill wasn’t paid in advance, an old man was kicked out from the hospital.....

‘Something like that can’t happen to my mother.’

Hyun-woo thought with clench teeth.

He wanted his mother to have confidence to live a whole life. But he had to shoulder his mum’s responsibility.

That thought was stronger than anything else in his head. He wanted her to devote herself to the treatment without worrying. It was Hyun-woo’s only wish.

His mother laughed as she saw Hyun-woo from inside the glass window. Hyun-woo waved his hand as he lost his stiff expression.

Rehabilitation was so difficult that a healthy person wouldn’t be able to imagine.

Yet his mother never once said it was difficult.

Hyun-Woo was actually the one that suffered most at the thought.

‘No, I don’t have it that hard.’

Hyun-woo wasn’t suffering at all compared to his mother.

‘Yes, now I can laugh in front of my mother because of New World. New World is the last remaining hope for me. New World is something I can never give up on. Not even what Andel or Alan think.....even if I have to crawl from the bottom up because of them, it isn’t possible for me to give up! If you disturb me then I’ll crawl up and step on you! I’ll show you the spirit of a poor person.’

Hyun-woo sat on a couch in the clinic and came up with an idea.

‘To do this, I need to quickly find a way through the entrance of the underground world.....’

Three days had passed since Hyun-woo entered the underground labyrinth. There was some trouble at first but now he has adapted and his level rose to 93. If it wasn’t for the stench then it would be a pretty decent hunting ground.

‘But, it isn’t money.’

That’s a problem.

So far, Hyun-woo had gained an average of 20~30 gold per day.

But he needed to earn a lot more if Hyun-woo wanted to earn the minimum necessary to maintain his life.

However, the items from the underground labyrinth could contribute to that.

The item drop rate is high even for a skeleton that doesn’t appear frequently and takes a while to hunt. In addition, he couldn’t ignore the outgoing money he spends on food and repair boxes.

‘Although I have a surplus in my bank account right now, it will become more difficult in the future. I also have to search the underground world for the fragment of the Three Marvels....’

However, he still hadn’t found the clues to enter that world.

He had already explored the 1, 2, and 3rd floors of the labyrinth. However, the completion rate of the map using the cartography skill was 99.9%. He couldn’t enter that space because the iron doors are blocking it.

‘What is the alternative? As for the riddle?’

Ark sighed and took out a memo pad from his pocket. On the notes were maps drawn of the underground hell.

It was a maze of intertwined pathways. He had found dozens of hidden wormholes during the investigation but he still hadn't even guessed the answer to the riddle. In addition, there was no possibility of a hidden passageway because the map's completion rate was 99.9%.

"Did you wait long?"

"Oh, mother!"

At that time, the door to the therapy room opened and his mother came out with the nurse.

Hyun-woo stood up and sat his mother on the couch.

His mother wiped off the sweat as she laughed.

"But what were you thinking so hard about? Are you studying something these days?"

"Oh, no. Just....."

"What is it? Let's see."

His mother nodded as she browsed through the notes.

"Ah, the dot-line puzzles you do when you're bored."

"Yes? Dot-line puzzle? "

"Yes, if you draw a line between the two points then the puzzle will be complete. Isn't that it? I did them quite often in the past.....ho ho ho, when we were dating your father sometimes made me those puzzles. He did the thing by hiding a heart pattern. Looks like its hand-drawn? Still, the person giving such puzzles must be spoiling you. Somehow, it is good to see."

Hyun-woo looked at the map with puzzled eyes.

Dot-line puzzle? "Was that visible?"

He tried to visualize it as he listened to his mother's speech.

Hyun-woo drew almost the entire map of the underground labyrinth and he had also marked the location of the wormholes with a dot. It would form a picture.

“Ara? Just as it is?”

Without thinking, Ark tilted his head as he connected a point with another point. Ark felt something strange so he laid the maps of the 1st to 3rd floor over each other and poked through the wormhole with a felt pen.

So, if you drill holes through all the wormholes on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors then a figure will be made?

It is none other thanthe three triangles overlapping shown on the iron doors! At the moment, a single thought flashed through Hyun-woo’s head.

-This place was sealed in accordance with the ancient vow.

If you can’t understand these words, there is no possibility of passing through to where I sleep.

A person with purpose could wake me up.

A person who makes the pilgrimage here with pride and speaks my name with respect will be able to cross.....

Those words were written on the iron doors.

Those who don’t know this place can’t enter.

‘The first hint means that I must learn the terrain of the labyrinth completely.’

Hyun-Woo had thought of this so he drew a map and carried it around as he studied it. However, the second and third questions on the riddle were still unanswered. But unexpected his mother had unravelled that.

‘A person with a purpose. That means if I want to enter the underground world, Ark has to say this! If I intentionally say this as I walk the labyrinth, a route might be discovered. And I have to speak as I pilgrimage along the markings!’

The markings were the wormholes that littered the underground labyrinth.

‘Pil, if I intentionally make the pilgrimage and express at the end of the wormhole then it might become clear! No, I can’t think beyond that. Oh god, it was so simple yet I was unaware for three days.

Now Hyun-woo could confidently entered New World. Nevertheless, he had lost three days contemplating the mystery and he also wasted time playing Tetris and Go stop with his mother.

Once you become familiar with the game, it was a trap.

After being too used to the game, he made every problem associated with the game and made it more difficult than it was. However, his mother doesn't know about New World. Just as she said, it's just what it looks like.

The original puzzle for those searching for an answer was not visible to the corporation.

Hyun-woo grasped his mother's hands and shouted.

"Mother! Mother has saved Ark!"

"What?" What do you mean, all of a sudden? Who is Ark? One of you foreign looking friends?"

"There is such a person. It is my alter ego. "

Alter ego? You, no waydid you get a girlfriend or something?"

"No, it's more precious than a girlfriend. Ark."

Hyun-woo answered with a laugh.

"Now, let's get started?"

After coming back from the hospital, Ark immediately connected with the game. A dim light spread as the familiar dirty landscape of the labyrinth appeared.

"Are you feeling fine, master?"

Dedric asked with a dubious expression once he was summoned.

Dedric, do you want to get out of here soon?"

"What?" If we can leave, but "

"Huhuhu, do not worry. We'll leave soon."

Ark said confidently and opened his map window.

Before connecting, he had already thought about where to start from.

'It is clockwise from the far right end. I was told to express respect and make a pilgrimage so I have to move in the right direction. If that doesn't work then try again from the opposite direction.'

Ark immediately smashed the skull of a skeleton and ran across the underground labyrinth. He was already tired of fighting skeletons. But he also didn't want anything new.

When a wormhole appeared while Ark was battling, he used Riposte and jumped down the hole. No matter how many skeletons appeared, if you jump down the wormhole then the chase was removed and battle ended.

'Now it is imperative to confirm the answer to the riddle! '

When he jumped down the wormhole, he immediately moved to a new area. He unfolded his map and using his cartography skills confirmed that if you connect a wormhole to another one with a straight line then the location corresponded to the middle part. The probability that it was the correct answer increased.

'The next wormhole is about 20 meters from here.'

Ark immediately moved to the next wormhole and plunged. He did this about 20 times, before Ark finally returned to the original wormhole he plunged through. Unfortunately, all the filth had accumulated on Ark's body that he arrived with a bad stench. His summons was the same.

In trying not to repeat the same mistakes, he grabbed Dedric and Skull when he entered the wormhole so they were also filthy.

"What the hell are you doing? Are you crazy? Why do you keep on plunging into dirty water?"

"You're noisy, without fail this will surely be the last time!"

Before Dedric could speak, Ark plunged into the first wormhole again.

It was at that time. When he jumped into the wormhole he heard a whirring sound and something felt different from the previous times.

Until now, the time it takes to go through the wormhole is a maximum of 10 seconds but this time felt longer. Up, down, sidewayshe was sucked in until it suddenly dropped him somewhere.

Kwajik, warururu!

Ark cried out as he fell to the bottom but quickly sat up and checked his surroundings.

‘As expected, this is the first time I’ve seen this!’

At that time, a bright sound rang out and a message window popped up.

-You have completed ‘Hell’s underground labyrinth.’

{Knowledge of Ancient Relics +15, Intelligence +10 and Fame increased by 30}

-You have completed the map of ‘Hell’s underground Labyrinth ‘ with a perfect 100% completion rate.

Painting a map of the underground labyrinth is now possible.

{Experience + 1000}

Ark was now sure that he had found the correct answer.

The place where Ark fell was a huge cavern.

It was a hidden room in the underground labyrinth with a huge amount of bones and skeletons piled up. It was an impossible place to find even when he was exploring every corner of the sewers! When he looked to the back, he saw that he was on the other side of the iron doors.

He had finally passed through those doors.

‘Somewhere here will be the entrance to the underground world! ‘

Ark stood up and scanned around. The cave mouth was wide open on the right side.

‘I wonder what kind of species lives in such a horrible place? Ara? But what is this?’

Ark’s excitement subsided as he explored the cave. There was still one unexpected hurdle remaining.

The cave entrance was blocked by a thick steel door. Fortunately, next to the iron door was a lever like stick that could open the door depending on its use, but the tip of the lever was broken.

“I can’t pull this lever. So what is the alternative way? ‘

Ark made a frustrated face.

Dudududu, ttadak, ttadak!

Suddenly, the floor started to shake like there was an earthquake.

At the same time, a black object rose from the ground and started attracting the bones together until an object was formed. And in the blink of an eye it snowballed to a huge size.

There was a huge chunk of skulls and bones moving through the air.

“Ugh, more bones?”

Dedric gave a cry of distress as a warning message appeared.

-The boss monster ‘Kraken’ has appeared!

‘Boss monster! ‘

He reflexively used Eyes of the Cat to display its information.

It was a level 150 boss monster!

While Ark was so puzzled at the situation that he couldn’t think, something elongated sprung from the Kraken’s body.

Hundreds of bones were attached to form a giant scythe! Ark felt an eerie aura as he rolled across the floor to the pile of bones.

It was formed from bone fragments all over the place.

‘Damn, I never thought there would be a boss monster here when I finally solved the riddle. But I didn’t come here to die. Anyway, this plan of desperation means I either strike first or die.

Ark drew his sword and rushed to the kraken.

“Dark blade!”

Double bang!

The violent roar of smashed bones was heard everywhere. The kraken was pushed and stumbled backwards. The shape reflected the Kraken’s nature.

Kuo oooo!

The kraken trembled and lifted all the bones connected to his arm up.

Scythe, spear, swordit assembled weapons of all shapes made out of bone and shot them towards Ark. The attack approached at the same time from four or five different directions! But Ark had experienced that attack countless times when fighting against the skeletons.

Once again there was no reason to panic.

‘It has returned!’

Ark rotated his body with his right foot and stabbed with his sword.

Putt putt POW!

The counter hit the spot where the kraken's arms were still growing. Because it was made of bone, when hit with the counter it shattered and fell to the ground without force. Of course, Ark was hit three or four times but he only lost 150 health.

'Okay, this guy. The damage of the boss wasn't that strong. By the way, the speed was surprisingly slow and easily crushed. Although the level was high, the difficulty was on the low side. I could easily win! '

"Dedric, Skull! Plan B! "

The opponent was a boss monster.
You don't need to use a complex operation.
The two summons moved to the different sides to keep the kraken's attention on them while Ark launched a counterattack.
He struck a flying arm, destroyed it and counter attacked many times. It didn't take long for Ark to realise that there was something strange about the assault.

'What, this guy? '

Although he hit it a number of times, the kraken did not lose any vitality. Not only that. Because the fight wasn't that difficult he forgot for a while and after using Eyes of the Cat, he realised that no weakness was indicated.

'What happened? Why is there no damage?'

There was something strange. However, Ark avoided the Kraken's offensive and just continued attacking for the time being.
In fact, there was no other way. So after a few minutes of violent attacks, there was a gap in the bones which showed a black shape.
A red dot on the black shape indicated the place to bombard with attacks.
Now Ark was able to understand the situation.

'I see. This guy is like the jellyfish and the slime. The bones were a suit of armour and if I remove all the bones at the gap then I can attack! This won't be so difficult!'

Ark narrowed the distance and used Dark Blade on the black stone.

No, as soon as he tried the Kraken turned its body around. At the same time, it released an intense gust of air and Ark was pushed back several meters. Thanks to that, the Dark Blade missed.

However, to Ark it was ludicrous as he snorted.

“The bones that grow move pretty slowly but when its weakness is exposed then it moves pretty fast. But to no avail. Because I’ll continue to attack until every bone disappears!”

However, that was Ark’s mistake.

Just as Ark was swinging his sword, the floor vibrated and the bones floated in the air. And like the first time, it was attracted like a magnet to the kraken.

Because it grew some bones, the bone armour was even thicker than before. In addition, the attacking bones were many times thicker and its speed had also increased.

Soeeeeeee! Double bang!

“What, what’s this ...!”

Ark avoided the attack by rolling on the ground while looking confused.

He had struggled for 10 minutes only for the situation to repeat itself. He destroyed the bone armour with his sword and then the kraken would quickly reform it. And the number of repeats also made the kraken bigger and stronger.

“This is ridiculous! How are you supposed to win against this guy?”

Profanities burst from Ark’s mouth.

Indeed, the bones were joined together. If the kraken was able to keep on infinitely grow the bones, did he have to fight and turn all those bones to powder? Even if Ark disagreed with the fight, in these conditions it would take 3 nights, ten four days than 5 nights and 6 days to fight for an unknown outcome.

‘There is a limit to avoidance. When the nucleus is shown, a storm is summoned and pushes you back so there is no way to approach. When it is such a shape then even Blade Storm wouldn’t be useful. But there might be a strategy. Is there a way to get to the nucleus without activating the storm?’

Ark who was desperately thinking suddenly thought of Skull.

‘Come to think of it.....’

In fact, Ark couldn’t grasp where Skull was.

Because there were bones rolling around, it was hard to distinguish between the bones and skulls.

Unlike Dedric whose attacks were unsuccessful, Skull's attacks had hit several times. In other words, even the kraken couldn't distinguish between the bones and skeletons.

Then an idea came to Ark's head.

'Bone? Skull? Oh I see, I see. There is a reason for me to approach! '

At that thought, Ark stepped forward and swung his sword before withdrawing. He confirmed that his remaining mana was only 300. A dangerous number.

"Blessing of the Sea Spirit!"

Ark activated Adelaine's Necklace which increased defense by 40% and restored 500 mana.

Now his remaining mana was 800! It was enough to take the risk.

'When using Blade Storm, it is fast but I don't know how long it may take from now on.' So now is the time to conserve mana! '

"Dedric, you too! Cancel summon!"

"What? Why?"

Dedric sent him a bewildered look.

Ark who had reduced mana consumption to a minimum went back to attacking. He shattered the bones with his sword and the scattered all over the place.

"Dark blade!"

Ark narrowed the distance without delay and shot off a Dark Blade at the body of the kraken.

A violent roar burst out of the bone armour as it split in half. Eventually, the appearance of the kraken was shown between the split bones. He figured that rotating the kraken's body was a normal process to produce a storm. That moment was a chance for Ark which he aimed at straight away!

"It is now! Skull, cancel summon and resummon!"

While Ark was caught in the storm, Skull was summoned to his hand.

Ark held his posture by concentrating power in his left foot before throwing Skull with all his strength. And shortly after the storm the kraken repaired his bone armour again and Ark approached.

As the kraken started forming a sword, it flinched.

At the same time, the 100% vitality of the kraken was finally reduced by 1%.

‘It’s a success! ‘

Ark clenched his fist and cried out.

This was the strategy that Ark was aiming for.

The kraken will continue to repair the bone armour.

The ingredients were the pile of stacked bones and skulls. If so, wasn’t Ark’s summon made of the same material?

Therefore, Ark delivered a big blow and the moment the kraken tried to repair his bone armour, Skull was thrown at the nucleus of the kraken. And the stupid kraken couldn’t discern between skulls and used it to make the armour.

Skull was attached right next to the nucleus!

Therefore, the kraken was being attacked from inside his bone armour. Skull’s damage wasn’t very high but if it bit from the inside then it still dealt damage. Plus the kraken had similar characteristics to the Jellyfish and slime as the nucleus has low defense.

After Skull bit the nucleus, the kraken’s health was visibly reduced. There was no way to stop Skull’s attack inside the kraken.

The armour used to protect itself is now biting and tearing.

‘Now my remaining mana is 600. The only Skull consumes mana then it should last for 10 minutes. I have no choice but to wish that Skull kills the kraken during that time!’

Kuo oooo!

The kraken roared from the painful attacks all over the place.

However, Ark had to abandon his attacks and just concentrate on avoidance. In addition, the kraken glimpsed the incoming damage and just attacked harder.

The kraken was revealing a much faster time than expected.

In just 5 minutes.

From Skull’s onslaught, the kraken was already in a critical condition.

The kraken couldn’t maintain the bony armour covering his body, and it fell to the floor as he began to lose power. And the view showed the sight of Skull crazily biting the black nucleus.

“Got it, thank you. Skull, now back off”

Ttadak! Ttak ttak ttak!

Skull, whose mouth was full biting the flesh of the kraken, got off and spat it out.
At the same time, Ark poured the rest of his mana into his sword for his last attack.

“Dark blade!”

The sword disappeared into darkness and suddenly appeared in front of the kraken.
Intense sound effects showed there was a critical hit.

Kuo oooo!

The health finally reached zero and the kraken started convulsing before exploding
in a storm of light. The storm scattered the bones in every direction.

-Your level has risen.

“Skull! Yes we won thanks to you!”

Ttak ttak ttak! Ttak, ttak ttak ttak!

Skull looked towards the sky.

.....It was laughing.

Ark turned his head and stroked the skull. It was a weird fellow, but still a boss
monster.

It dropped a lot of booty. As expected, where the kraken had disappeared was a
black sword plunged into the ground.

“Eh? This, this is! ”

Ark’s mouth opened as he confirmed the information.

Saw blade (Cursed)

A long time ago, the spines of the bodies dumped in hell was used to make this
sword. The kraken which rules the underground labyrinth absorbed it into its body
where a strong curse was applied.

{The stats cannot be determined until the curse is released}

It wasn’t an ordinary weapon.

It was made out of a person’s sharpened spinal bones. But somehow it was a good
shape.

The reason for Ark’s surprise was the curse on the item. Curse weapons, Lancel’s
sword which made Dedric evolve was also a cursed weapon.

“Purification Restoration!”

Ark immediately used the skill and watched in anticipation.

[Saw blade (Magic Sword) Weapon type: One-handed sword

Durability: 70

Attack: 23~25

Weight: 25

User restriction: Dark Attribute

Level: 80

In the past, the one year old Monarch who built Cairo used the spinal bones of those who opposed him to make this sword. At the time, it was ambushed by a group of barbarians and abandoned at the bottom of the hell in Cairo, where it was imbued by an immortal spirit with a mysterious power. Unfortunately, it was absorbed by the kraken where a grudge was formed and it suffered for a long time.

If someone killed the kraken and liberated the soul of the sword than he would be thankful to you.]

-The special effect of this magic sword once a day: The master of the Magic Sword can summon ‘Warwick’ once a day.

“As expected, it is a magic sword!”

He naturally cheered.

Ever since Dedric evolved underwater using Lancel’s Sword, Ark had frantically been searching for information on the magic sword.

Because the bat evolved, he was able to experience how much Dedric changed. However, he still couldn’t find information on magic swords.

And he did not have any expectations to find a magic sword in this place.....!

Saw blade, it was a cool name.

‘Could the Saw Blade evolve Skull instead of Dedric?’

If possible, he hoped so.

Dedric who was already evolved now had a high utilization rate.

On the other hand, thanks to the stats, skills and ability to walk of Skull, its utilization was gradually disappearing. In the old days you could use it as a shield, now the monsters were higher level that Skull couldn’t really last against them.

‘I’ll experiment immediately. What kind of guy will appear?’

“Snap!”

A muffled sound was suddenly heard from his waist. While Ark had been investigating the sword, Snake had automatically started peering at other items and seemed to have found something. Something seemed to be shining from the Kraken’s bone gap. Snake extended its tongue to receive praise from Ark. At that moment Snake’s tongue got stuck.

“Kkaek, kkaek kkaek kkaek!

“Ara? Snake! Are you ok?”

Ark started tugging at Snake’s tongue. Then the bones scattered and something was pulled out. It is.....

“What, what the?” This is?”

Ark muttered with a foolish expression.

[End of Book 04]